

MAIL AND FEMALE



Epistolary Narrative and Desire
in Ovid's *Heroides*

Sara H. Lindheim

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Mail and Female

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For my family:

Bob, Eric, and Matthew

and

Mom, Dad, and Rachel

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Mail and Female

Introduction

Re-Reading Ovid's *Heroides*

In dreams, a writing tablet signifies a woman, since it receives the imprints of all kinds of letters.

Artemidorus, *Onirocritica*

A little over fifteen years ago, Florence Verducci tellingly referred to Ovid's *Heroides*, a collection of fifteen letters in elegiac verse from mythological heroines to the heroes who have abandoned them,¹ as the "one work . . . which seems stubbornly to resist any final exhumation from the crypt of Ovidian disrepute."² Since 1985, however, critical reassessments of *Heroides* 1–15 have emerged,³ all striving to redress the collection's previous marginalization from the study of Latin poetry. Yet many questions about this text still remain unexplored, especially in the area of gender studies. Indeed, the *Heroides* can contribute in many ways to the current debate about the construction of gender and identity in Augustan Rome. The striking premise that each poem represents a letter composed by the heroine asks us, according to the conventions of the epistolary genre, to read the Ovidian collection, at least on one level, as the authentic narratives of the letter writers, that is, as the written products of *women*.⁴ In every epistle a female speaker fashions a picture of herself. Further, the story that each heroine recounts is a (heterosexual) love story. These letters focus the narrative spotlight squarely on hero and

heroine, male and female, as they take shape (acquire identity) in and through the erotic relationship.

By means of three different approaches—an examination of genre, of feminine desire, of Sappho's poetic voice—I show how the *Heroides* provocatively and relentlessly explore the connection for women between desire and the instability of identity. More precisely, the Ovidian collection unmasks the woman's protean and ephemeral nature whenever she embarks on an erotic relationship with a man. In the context of desire, in one letter after another, the Ovidian heroine's self turns out to be no more than a variety of performances she puts on for the sake of capturing once again the desire of the lover who has abandoned her. And yet, here one must ask two questions. Ultimately, whose hand is at work behind the letter, Ovid's or the heroine's? In other words, is Woman really no more than a shape-shifting performer of roles, or is this the comfortable and self-(pre)serving illusion that the male poet holds out to his male readers? And, does it matter to distinguish between Ovid and heroine as author?

The poet draws his material from prior texts concerned with the actions and emotions of heroes. From the margins of these texts he plucks the women who play secondary, if at times compelling, roles in the narratives, and places them center stage. Dido relates her version of the story of Aeneas' devastating visit to her kingdom; Penelope offers her perspective on the seemingly endless wanderings of Ulysses. Ovid seems to empower his heroines to re-create their narratives from an entirely subjective point of view. He tantalizes the reader with the possibility of radical recountings of established, traditional tales. And yet, whether she examines only one of the epistles or peruses the entire collection, the reader does not marvel at their innovative perspective but rather wrestles with a general and overwhelming sense that somehow she has heard it all before.

Much of the critical writing about the *Heroides* has censured Ovid for the repetitiveness that pervades the collection, an occasional begrudging bow to his wit or to his capacity for a brilliant turn of phrase notwithstanding.⁵ As if in response, a more recent trend discovers critics attempting to deny the iterative nature of the text, or, at the opposite extreme, refusing to address the problem in any fashion.⁶ The repetition in these poems, however, does not deserve censure, nor can it be lightly dismissed. On

the contrary, I suggest that the idea of repetition lies at the heart of the *Heroides* as one of the major interpretive issues of this text. A reading of the poems requires full exploration and resolution of three striking issues that all touch, to varying degrees, on the notion of repetition. The collection features throughout its fifteen letters noticeably repetitious language, characters, and narratives. Is this just bad poetry or must an interpretation of the *Heroides* take into account the iterative quality of the text? Deeply entwined with the first issue, why do the self-portraits that the heroines offer, striking in that they present the heroines as strangely disjointed amalgamations of disunified characteristics, suspiciously resemble one another, at times even self-consciously underlining their similarities? Finally, why does each heroine, ostensibly in control of the production of the text, represent herself as a masquerader or performer of roles? Why does woman emerge from this text as no more than a series of costumes in which she clothes herself? My discussion makes an effort to address these concerns by examining both the form and the content of the text, drawing on literary theories of epistolarity and on psychoanalytic theories of desire, in combination with the notion of ventriloquism and its feminist implications.

My reading of the *Heroides* focuses on the implications of Ovid's choice not simply to rewrite the canonical tales of great heroes (for example, Odysseus, Heracles, Aeneas) but to accomplish this task by adopting a woman's voice. Formalist critics of the *Heroides* have well studied the poet's witty attempts to reconceptualize or to decenter the canon, highlighting Ovid's use of the more personal, less elevated elegiac genre to retell lofty, heroic stories, and concentrating on the relationship he establishes, by means of the heroines' epistles, to the prior or "source texts" from which he draws his material.⁷ These analyses often provide compelling literary interpretations of the various poems in Ovid's epistolary collection. They also, however, to my mind, fail to provide an adequate reading of what is at stake when Ovid assumes the female voice.

In fact, ultimately many formalist interpretations of the *Heroides* emphasize the relationship between poet and reader, or between poet, "source text," and reader, at the expense of the heroine. Some argue that the *Heroides* reveal Ovid parodying the abandoned woman's lament, some that he playfully reconceives

the “source text” by transposing its genre. Yet others claim that Ovid enters into an antagonistic relationship to the “source text” either poetically—“I can write it better”—or politically—“in opposition to the ‘source text’ and the leading Augustan values, I embrace private, subjective values of love.”⁸ Because of where they locate their interest, these interpretations do not sufficiently explain the iterative quality apparent both at the level of narrative and in the doubled and disjointed self-presentation of the heroine from letter to letter throughout the collection. The question lingers: why do the heroines portray themselves as they do? Formalist criticism, by leaving this issue aside, does not serve to explicate the text fully.

My reading of the *Heroides*, while taking account of the concerns raised by the formalist critics, concentrates on the heroine. Linking intertextual and genre-based—formalist—observations with an interpretation that draws on issues from the contemporary debate about the construction of gender, sexuality, and identity, I examine the portraits that Ovid, by assuming the female voice, carefully constructs of his heroines. My work takes its place within an increasing amount of classical scholarship, especially in the field of Roman poetry, that seeks to uncover how gender and sexual identity do not preexist social organization based on biological universals, but rather come into existence as cultural constructs, products of specific historical, social, political relations imposed on the body.⁹ The *Heroides*, when examined through a combination of feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives, have much to say not only about the construction of the feminine but also about the male construction of the feminine.

Gian Biagio Conte has recently articulated, in a full and compelling fashion, the importance of genre to classical literature in general and to the work of the poets of the Augustan Age in particular.¹⁰ Genre provides a blueprint, or the rules of formation, for a work of literature, encoding the appropriate meter, themes, diction, tone, characters, situations. Through his choice of genre, an author communicates certain guidelines to the reader, certain parameters within which interpretation must take place. For the *Heroides*, in a typically Ovidian fashion, questions of genre are rather complex.¹¹ The poet draws on the conventions of two separate generic paradigms: epistolary and elegiac. My re-reading

of the *Heroides* centers on their intersection, or on Ovid's choice to manipulate two generic frameworks for one text.

In fact, doubleness pervades the *Heroides*. In the heroines' laments the reader constantly trips over a disjunctive, often unresolvable, doubleness: in each letter's two addressees, the internal and the external reader, in the textual illusion of twinned authorship (heroine and poet), in the counterpoint between Ovidian epistle and its "source text," and in the heroine's own self-depiction. Indeed, recent interpretations of the *Heroides* focus on this lack of unity. The gap between poet and heroine as author of the text, and between "source text" and Ovidian letter, allows Ovid a place from which to reveal his masterly manipulation of irony and his brilliant strategies of wit.¹² Alternatively, by self-consciously drawing attention to the gap the poet rewrites the ideology present in the "source text" through the subjective perspective of the heroine.¹³ Or, as intertextual critics would have it, Ovid playfully underscores the transposition of genres that the heroine has undergone in order to appear in his collection.¹⁴

The emphasis on the relationship between previous text and Ovidian epistle has the advantage of establishing Ovid's sense, certainly pervasive in all his work, of his belatedness to the poetic tradition. In addition, a reader who ignores Ovid's wit or rhetorical *jeux d'esprit* does so to her own disadvantage. And yet, to focus on political or poetic subversion does not open up a discussion specific to the *Heroides*; both interpretive paths ensure that the reader consider the Ovidian text only in conjunction with, or in comparison to, the prior texts on which the *Heroides* draw. On one level, Ovid's text certainly invites such a comparison. But what about Ovid's choice to pair epistle and elegy, letter and desire? An exploration of these features, and especially of the doublenesses inherent in them, opens up an emphatically different series of questions and considerations.

Ovid's epistolary collection draws the reader into the illusion that she is listening to the voices of fifteen heroines, authentically female voices, all lamenting abandonment by their lovers.¹⁵ Since the heroine offers her first person narrative, the poet himself is readily effaced; we hear her voice, not his. The letter functions as a veil behind which Ovid hides, as he constructs, by means of "transvestite ventriloquism"¹⁶ or cross-gendered narration, an elaborate fiction of granting woman a voice. And yet, the

vigilant reader will consider the role that the author plays in shaping the heroine's narrative. The male poet's voice, speaking in the guise of various female characters, challenges us to ponder the nature of the text's gendered subject. To what end does Ovid grant the heroine what he pretends is her own voice? Is Ovid really "writing like a woman," or does he instead write Woman like a man? What concerns me is not an exploration of essentialism, that is to say of whether only female authors can speak a "female experience" while such a possibility is biologically, or somehow naturally, foreclosed to male authors. I consider instead how Ovid imagines woman and her desire as if in her voice, and I question what these configurations reveal about the Ovidian heroine, and, by extension, about how Ovid constructs Woman in general. We shall see that, in the end, the illusion Ovid works so hard to create—that these are, in fact, uncomplicated, unmediated female voices—shatters.

The first chapter, by examining Ovid's decision to employ the epistolary form for the narratives of the lamenting heroines, begins to dismantle the illusion that the *Heroides* really succeed in speaking with the female voice. The letter leads the reader to one generic expectation in particular. An epistle offers a medium for the subjective narration of events and emotions. Without the impediment of an ordering, external narrating voice, the letter writer possesses an opportunity to create her own story from her own perspective, to fashion her own character and desires. The epistle, then, can become a vehicle for the writer's construction and expression of her own identity. On the surface, Ovid empowers the heroines through an opportunity to tell their own stories.

Through readings of the epistles of Penelope to Ulysses, Briseis to Achilles, and Deianira to Hercules, all chosen for their self-conscious attention to the epistolary form, I seek to delineate the falseness of the expectations that arise in the reader because the heroine has the chance to narrate her own story. Rather than embracing the epistolary convention that grants the writer the power to narrate events as she sees fit, the heroines choose instead to highlight another, contradictory convention of the genre: the power the addressee exerts on how the writer chooses to shape the epistle's contents. A careful examination of the letters, consciously juxtaposed with readings of the "source texts" that focus on the various heroines, reveals that the Ovidian women,

while potentially in possession of the power to create and to cast themselves in roles central to their stories, instead enter into a conversation with the prior telling(s), managing, through epistolary conventions, to rewrite to their own disadvantage even texts in which they play secondary roles. Each woman shifts the absent hero into the textual center as if carefully shaping her narrative to highlight what she believes he wants to read. She offers him a version of her own story that features him as its *protagonist*, its center; she focuses on him as her point of reference for self-definition. While the letter form opens up the possibility of first-person, subjective storytelling for the heroine, in fact she turns the generic conventions of epistolary writing against herself. A consideration of the letter's generic commonplaces reveals Ovid subtly presenting the heroine as if she were voluntarily *choosing* a position at the margins of her own narrative.

The second chapter considers further the issue of the heroines' construction of self. To focus on the epistolary nature of the Ovidian text is to concentrate on only one of the two generic frameworks of the *Heroides*. These poems represent not only letters but also letters from heroines to their hero-lovers (or husbands). The context is amatory, the poetry elegiac. The elegiac aspect of the text directs us to read the *Heroides* as poems that explore desire and the heroines as constructs within an erotic context. The emergence of desire as a key issue for reading the Ovidian collection leads me to psychoanalysis; for psychoanalysis concerns itself, above all, with theories of desire. More specifically, I turn to the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan because his work serves as a fruitful tool for shedding light on the ways in which the heroines present themselves.

While a study of the conventions of epistolarity reveals how the heroine accords tremendous power to the hero both as a character in her narrative and as the driving force behind the way she chooses to tell her story, an examination of desire sheds new light on the heroine's reasons for creating such a dominant hero. As we move beyond the generic confines of the epistle toward an exploration of desire, we discover that the women's self-portraits appear more complicated than mere exercises in self-marginalization. The heroines seem to highlight the heroes' power for self-serving reasons, maybe even self-empowering ones. Explaining the structure of feminine desire, Lacan argues

that a woman performs a series of roles, often highly contradictory ones, in an effort to ensure that she will be a man's¹⁷ eternal object of desire.¹⁸ The heroines want the heroes who have abandoned them to reinstate themselves as the heroines' lovers (husbands), and, therefore, the women construct themselves, and, by extension, the heroes, with an eye to achieving their objective. The Ovidian heroines try on various, even antithetical, roles, fashioning themselves as disjointed amalgamations of disunified characteristics. We shall explore the method of self-representation in the letters of Dido, Phyllis, and Ariadne, who, I argue, represent the "classic case" of the abandoned woman in this collection, as well as the somewhat altered manner in which Medea and Hypsipyle portray themselves.

If Lacanian theory offers us an explanation for the heroines' disunified and incoherent selves, it also provides us with an answer to the second, vexed critical issue concerning the *Heroides*, namely the problem of repetition. A close examination of the self-portraits of these five distinct heroines reveals that each woman has the same limited repertoire of performances; the heroines all appear alternately in the guise of powerful and helpless women. Lacan argues that while the performances women act out in an effort to capture men's desire may be all men see of women, there remains something beyond the performance—or rather many things that one cannot boil down to a universal but that nonetheless exist. One cannot put a finger on the essence of woman, because, according to Lacan, she is "not-whole."¹⁹ Nevertheless, Lacan continues, we certainly attempt to generalize about Woman, positing the existence of a single principle by which to define all women. This attempt to create a homogeneity out of the heterogeneity of women, however, remains an illusion. Each time we offer a comprehensive definition of Woman, we create her as a fantasy. By means of deliberate and relentless repetition, as one heroine after another takes center stage to act out her performance, an overwhelming feeling emerges from the *Heroides* that these heroines do indeed share a general unifying characteristic. Instead of a celebration of women's protean natures, the endless reiteration of similar sorts of performances leaves the reader with a sense of women's sameness; the *Heroides* reduce every woman to an alternating amalgamation of *identical* roles, to a performer who operates

solely within a very specific set of parameters. The persistent repetition of the masquerades in woman after woman draws attention to Woman's homogeneity. The *Heroides* offer us an illusion about Woman.

In the third chapter I argue that Ovid makes his best case for discovering an underlying homogeneity in Woman with the final epistle in the collection of the single *Heroides*, the letter from Sappho to Phaon. I suggest that this poem holds a key to reading the *Heroides* as a whole. Offering the reader the opportunity to consider Ovid's text in conjunction with Sappho's own poetry, *Heroides* 15 provides something of a test case for questioning the role of the gendered authorial voice in the construction of Woman and of her desire. A reading of some of Sappho's fragments, inspired by recent feminist interpretations as well as by Lacanian theory, reveals quite a different approach to the representation of women than the one Ovid fastens onto in the *Heroides*. While Ovid emphasizes the similarities among his heroines, seemingly attempting to categorize all women as Woman, Sappho's poetry, an authentic (by which I mean not emanating from cross-gendered ventriloquism) female voice expressing feminine passion, has the opposite effect. One discovers, at many levels in her poetry, in her depictions of women, their desires and the spaces in which they move, a celebration of diffuseness and of deliberate disintegration of categories.

In sharp contrast, Ovid transforms his Sappho of *Heroides* 15 into a broken woman lamenting her abandonment by a man. Surprisingly disavowing her prior female homoeroticism, she insists that with Phaon she has experienced true passion and that now without him she can no longer live. As if repudiating Sappho's visions of desire and women, the Ovidian Sappho, through haunting echoes of Sapphic verse, does not reproduce Sappho's refusal to reduce women to Woman, but rather presents herself in such a way that she resembles the other heroines of Ovid's epistolary collection. In her pointed divergence from her "source text" the Ovidian Sappho uncovers once and for all the illusion that Ovid, carefully masked by his role as ventriloquist, quietly engineers: Woman is not indefinable. On the contrary, one can reduce her to a generalization. The prevailing sense of sameness from heroine to heroine, the feeling of eternal repetition that the Ovidian Sappho highlights more than any other heroine because

of the tremendous transformation she has undergone from her "source text," serves as the means by which Ovid limits and defines Woman.

What, ultimately, do we make of the difference between Ovid and Sappho on the question of constructing Woman? Why does Ovid insist on unifying his heroines, suggesting the possibility of generalization that applies to all women, while Sappho deliberately celebrates multivalency, polyphony, and most of all the inability to imagine Woman? Lacanian arguments about Woman, or the lack thereof, shed some light on the impasse. In light of Lacan's observations about the perpetual power of the reductionist impulse where women are concerned, I suggest it is no surprise that Ovid too, in the face of (masculine) anxiety about women's uncontrollable, indefinable diversity and otherness, cannot resist the temptation to construct Woman, offering her, in the *Heroides*, a definition as one who eternally performs, yet carefully limiting her masquerade to a few identical roles, thus underlining the homogeneity of Woman. But his fantasy, as Lacan will help to demonstrate, suffers the fate of all fantasies, and, in the final analysis, unravels.

1

Mail and Female

Epistolary Narrative and Ovid's Heroines

Granted then, that all of literature is a long letter to an invisible other, a present, a possible, or a future passion that we rid ourselves of, feed, or seek.

Three Marias: New Portuguese Letters

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Ovid's choice to write the *Heroides* as letters. I explore what is at stake when Ovid decides to compose the stories of famous heroines abandoned by their lovers or husbands employing epistolary composition for their utterances. On the surface, an epistolary text seems to offer many advantages. The epistle accords a realistic flavor to Ovid's artistic creation; "real" women in antiquity did indeed communicate through letters.¹ The poet, then, seems to have discovered an appropriate medium for the heroine at long last granted an opportunity to tell her story. Further, a consideration of the generic tenets of epistolarity reveals that the epistle should complement well the desired goals of the heroine. Deserted by her lover, she strives to tell her story in her own words, and, in the process, to compel his return. Subjective narration, with all its rhetorical potential for persuasion, as well as a sense of immediacy that indicates the writer's attempt to create the illusion of the absent addressee's presence, are hallmarks of the epistolary form.

The Ovidian heroines, however, do not seize the opportunity, afforded by the epistolary genre, to construct their subjective narratives to their own utmost advantage. On the contrary, they seem very carefully to pick and choose the generic features of the letter by which they will abide. They tend to ignore the generic possibilities of the epistle that empower the writer, and highlight instead the shortcomings of letter writing for the correspondent. The letter, as we shall see, often features tension, or a precarious balancing of opposites, when it reaches the height of its generic possibilities—for example, a tension between the power of the writer and the force exerted by the reader over the composition, or a tension between the epistle's ability to erase the distance between correspondent and addressee and the fact of that distance itself, which makes a letter necessary. In letter after letter the Ovidian heroines resolve the tension, or tip the balance, to their own disadvantage, manipulating the generic tenets of epistolarity to do so. Staunchly, perversely, they manage to employ the medium in the service of self-marginalization. Over the course of this chapter we shall consider how three Ovidian heroines, Penelope, Briseis, and Deianira, fail to capitalize on the generic possibilities of epistolary writing, and further, how they emphasize its generic disadvantages.

Why, then, does Ovid choose (and it *is* a choice) the epistle as a vehicle for the heroine's self-expression? Why, when seemingly offering her a long-awaited chance to speak, does he grant her a medium that she then undermines by manipulating it against herself? We the readers know that ultimately no hero returns to the heroine he has left behind because he has been persuaded by her mail. In this chapter I argue that Ovid, acknowledged master of generic games, plays one in the *Heroides* at the expense of his heroines. As one epistolary theorist explains, the letter stands as "a form in which fiction conventionally masquerades as a real-life product."² Ovid's choice of the letter format brings questions of "reality" and "authenticity" to the fore; the poet asks his reader to believe not that the particular heroine actually wrote the mis-sive, but rather that this is how the heroine, a woman, would write if she were granted such an opportunity.

An epistolary text, a means of communication readily acceptable to the reader as one a woman might employ, provides an ideal form of fiction for Ovid to hide his own voice, and to

disguise his love letters instead as products of authentic female voices. But since Ovid is the one animating his heroines' words, and further, since he chooses to do so in a manner that effaces his presence through a sort of ventriloquism, then we as readers cannot ignore the effect Ovid produces when he creates the illusion that he is writing like a woman. We must ponder the nature of the text's gendered subject, the nature of the (male) construction of the feminine. My purpose in this chapter, then, is twofold. First, I begin the examination of how Ovid constructs the heroines in the *Heroides*. What picture of these women emerges from the poet's epistolary collection if we concentrate solely on their self-portraits in relation to the generic requirements of letter writing? Secondly, and this aspect remains ineluctably intertwined with the first, I seek to focus attention on the question of transvestite ventriloquism. Ovid's assumption of the female voice remains the key to reading this text. Ultimately, I argue, the illusion that the *Heroides* present uncomplicated female voices shatters. The first chapter constitutes the first step toward the goal of this study: unmasking the illusion and then showing how and why it disintegrates. By the end of the third chapter we shall see that a significant difference exists between the voice of a man writing like a woman and the words of a woman writing.

Genre(s) in the *Heroides*

To examine the *Heroides* in light of the conventions of letter writing is to consider the text in terms of genre. In the most recent edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Gian Biagio Conte and Glenn Most define genre as "a grouping of texts related within the system of literature by their sharing recognizably functionalized features of form and content."³ And yet, they argue, genre serves a greater purpose than simply to provide a means to categorize texts. In addition to furnishing a "descriptive grid" for classification, genre is also "a system of literary projection inscribed within the texts, serving to communicate certain expectations to readers and to guide their understanding."⁴ Every literary work communicates meaning to its audience through genre. Genre holds out to the reader a certain set of conventions or characteristics by which she can navigate her way through a new text

and which grant her preconceived expectations that the text then affirms, manipulates, or subverts. Indeed, "a means of signification incorporated into the text to give form and meaning to the discourse and instructions to its reader, the genre is in fact the horizon marking the boundaries of its meaning and delimiting its real possibilities within the system of literary codification."⁵

The poets of the Augustan age display a strong preoccupation with generic issues.⁶ But Ovid, even more than his predecessors, seems, as Conte astutely points out, keenly aware of poetic genres and of the various possibilities for their manipulation.⁷ Indeed, it is not new, in Ovidian criticism, to proclaim the poet's fascination with generic experimentation, palpable in every one of his poetic works.⁸ Ovid understands the power of genre simultaneously to limit and to broaden literary interpretation. To write in a particular genre evokes in the reader a particular set of expectations and responses, while at the same time, within the common frame of reference that links reader and author through genre, the poet can discover ways for innovation within the precise generic boundaries. Ovid revels in witty and playful pushing and/or redrawing of generic parameters, compelling, for example, elegiac verse to accommodate didactic poetry in the *Ars Amatoria*, and hexameter to present elegiac narrative (at times) in the *Metamorphoses*. The *Heroides* reveal a similar experimentation.

Conte suggests that the *Heroides* break new ground in attempting to fill a "blank" generic space, one "created and delimited at the borders of [an] already existing genre."⁹ The *Heroides* belong to the elegiac genre, both in terms of subject matter and in terms of meter.¹⁰ The Latin elegiac tradition, therefore, offers the reader of the *Heroides* the first foothold in her search to interpret the text, ordering the writings of the heroines according to a specific, and well-delineated, literary code. As critics have extensively explored and explicated elegiac ideology,¹¹ I shall rehearse only briefly the various conventions, situations, characters, and privileged terms that provide the framework of elegy when its focus is love. Erotic elegy centers on the notion that the only possible life is one devoted to the pursuit of love. The lover-poet sees himself as a slave to his private passion, a weak creature who refuses traditional values, turning his back on public affairs of state, especially war, on heroism, and on socially sanctioned moral behavior. Instead, he celebrates his personal suffering,

complaining about his beloved's faithlessness, accusing her of betrayal, lamenting her lack of love, supplicating her to remain his. Upholding private emotion over public action, the lover-poet redeploys terms from the public sphere—*fides* ("faith"), *pietas* ("piety"), *foedus* ("bond/treaty"), for example—attributing new significance in the realm of individual emotion and personal relationship to these words used traditionally to describe a range of relations within an accepted model of (male) socio-political interaction.¹²

In many ways, the elegiac framework imposes meaning on the *Heroides*.¹³ The heroines' recurring laments, recriminations, accusations, professions of weakness and enslavement, as well as the language of faith, piety, and sacred bonds begin to make specific sense. Conte presses the interpretation further, expressively asserting: "elegy becomes a model of the world that reproduces more exactly women's life, a life of suffering, true *servitium*, humiliation. The *Heroides* create a literary genre that is almost ingrained in women's sociocultural condition; they are the declension of the elegiac paradigm in the feminine gender."¹⁴ Conte suggests that these poems explore how elegy might differ if gender roles were reversed, if a female lover-poet were to write about her male lover. The *Heroides*, he claims, serve to reveal how well suited elegy is to the female voice. And indeed, most interpreters who consider Ovid's heroines with an eye toward questions of genre agree with Conte, focusing on elegy in their readings of the *Heroides*.

And yet, if the *Heroides* belong to the world of elegy, we must also be vigilant with respect to Ovid's propensity for manipulation of generic boundaries. I would argue, here parting company with Conte, that the epistolary nature of the text exerts an equally strong generic influence over the collection. Not only are the *Heroides* elegies, they are also letters. In fact, the poet broadens the definition of what elegy can, and does, encompass specifically by means of epistolary writing. The generic delineations of both elegy and epistolarity help the reader of Ovid's *Heroides* to fashion meaning for the text. Postponing further consideration of elegy and its generic demands until the second chapter, I concentrate first on letters. I begin by focusing on the general conventions of ancient epistolary texts as well as the recurrent themes and tropes in literary letters that have a direct bearing on my

reading of the *Heroides*. I shall then consider how the Ovidian heroines use aspects of epistolarity to express their laments over their erotic abandonment.

EPISTOLARY EXPECTATIONS

Although Ovid seems to claim that he “invented” the fictional letter,¹⁵ the fictional epistle, as Patricia Rosenmeyer has demonstrated in her recent book, enjoys a rich literary history before the poet turns his attention to it.¹⁶ Taking as her starting point J. Sykutris’ typology of letters in the ancient world, official (i.e., government) letters, private literary letters (e.g., Cicero’s correspondence), didactic letters (i.e., the epistle as an excuse to expound some scientific or philosophic treatise, like the letters of Epicurus), the letter in verse (e.g., Ovid’s exilic works and his *Heroides*), and the fictive prose letter,¹⁷ Rosenmeyer shows how pervasive and versatile a form the epistle proves to be in the hands of Greek authors. She traces its appearance in Greek literature through a wide range of genres: Homeric epic, history, tragedy, Hellenistic poetry, the Greek novel, pseudonymous letter collections, and the epistolary anthologies from the Second Sophistic. While some of these texts were composed later than the *Heroides*,¹⁸ we shall see how letters in Greek literature that predate Ovid offer the poet many generic aspects to draw on as he turns his hand to epistolary composition.

Beyond the scope of Rosenmeyer’s book, we discover that pre-Ovidian Latin literature also provides examples of epistolary composition: the embedded letters in Plautine comedy, Cicero’s copious volumes of prose missives to Atticus, to his brother, to Brutus, to friends and family, Horace’s meditations on friendship and patronage in a collection of verse epistles, and, most important for its relationship to the *Heroides*, Propertius’ elegy 4.3, a poetic letter from a young wife to her absent soldier-husband. Some of these texts, too, play a significant role in shaping the generic conventions Ovid manipulates as he offers his heroines the epistle as their means for self-expression. In addition, Ovid himself, albeit in poetry that he wrote after the *Heroides*, unveils his own views on the possibilities inherent in the letter form. He explicitly provides advice to both men and women on the subject of writing love letters in the *Ars Amatoria*,¹⁹ and then turns to epistolary composition for his exilic poetry in the *Tristia* and the

Epistulae Ex Ponto. His use of epistolary conventions will provide us with additional insights about the generic framework into which Ovid inserted his heroines, as the poet himself conceived of it. What follows then is not an exhaustive look at all epistolary composition up to and including Ovid—a task that would certainly require volumes rather than pages—but instead an examination of the particular epistolary conventions and expectations we shall have occasion to see Ovid drawing on and manipulating in the *Heroides*.

Let us begin by taking a look at epistolary texts that predate the *Heroides* in an effort to cull from them some rudimentary generic outline for epistolary composition available to a poet with a keen sense of his literary precursors. The literary critic “Demetrius,” probably working in the first century B.C.E., in his treatise *On Style*,²⁰ most comprehensively expresses the theoretical possibilities of the letter form. He offers explanatory statements about the form, function, and content of a letter in an excursus on plain style. Cicero, although more fragmentarily, envisions similar possibilities for the genre in his personal correspondence, and his notions are echoed in ways worth noting by Seneca in the *Epistulae Morales*, his meditations in epistolary form.²¹ While Cicero never specifically sets forth the theoretical conventions of a letter (and this holds true for Seneca also), nevertheless he discloses his thoughts on certain aspects of epistolary writing in his actual correspondence, composed, in all probability, within the same century as the treatise of “Demetrius.” In conjunction with the material in these texts, to show that Ovid was indeed aware of the generic conventions of letter writing, we shall simultaneously consider how the poet’s own epistolary works from exile reflect an understanding of the letter’s generic requirements.

Both Cicero and Seneca perceive that a letter demands absence as its prerequisite; the letter writer composes a missive to an addressee who is, temporarily or permanently, absent from the writing correspondent.²² While absence is the condition that engenders the necessity of an epistle, presence is the illusion the letter writer attempts to create. And yet, the epistle itself, an attempt to bridge the gap separating writer from addressee, points, by its very existence, to the distance—spatial, temporal, emotional—between the correspondents. At the heart of the letter as a form of

expression lies a fundamental doubleness that causes one modern epistolary theorist to highlight the "protean aspect" of an epistolary text,²³ explaining that "The letter . . . does tend to define itself in terms of polarities such as . . . presence/absence, bridge/barrier. These polarities guarantee the letter's flexibility and define its parameters. . . . The definition of epistolarity is . . . charged with paradox and contradiction. The opposite of almost any important trait can be equally a characteristic of the letter form."²⁴ Ancient epistolary texts bear out this statement.

Demonstrating that, in his mind, a letter temporarily brings together two correspondents separated by physical distance, Cicero asks rhetorically, *aut quid mi iucundius quam, cum coram tecum loqui non possim, aut scribere ad te aut tuas legere litteras* ("or, when I am not able to speak with you in person, what is sweeter to me than either to write to you or to read a letter of yours")?²⁵ For Cicero, a letter most effectively erases the distance between writer and addressee by creating a sense of illusory dialogue. Whether Cicero himself composes the missive or whether he receives one in return, he muses on the letter's ability to simulate actual conversation. Vividly, the writer imagines his addressee as he pens his epistle and, in turn, the reader imagines the presence of the writer when he receives and peruses the correspondence. Out of absence comes the creation of illusory presence and conversational exchange. Cicero confesses to his addressee that he writes even when he has no news, even when he has just sent a letter, offering the simple explanation: *tecum loqui videor* ("I seem to speak with you").²⁶ Indeed, Cicero reiterates the sentiment in another missive—I send a line, he asserts, *tecum ut quasi loquerer* ("in order that I might speak with you, as it were.")²⁷

Ovid similarly perceives that the letter has the potential to erase the absence between writer and addressee by acting as a stand-in for verbal conversation. He attempts to imagine away the distance that separates him from his addressee when he explicitly refers to the written word as an equivalent alternative to the spoken one:

utque solebamus consumere longa loquendo
tempora, sermoni deficiente die,
sic ferat ac referat tacitas nunc littera voces,
et peragant linguae charta manusque vices

[And just as we used to be accustomed to while away large amounts of time in discussion until the day ran out on our conversation, so now let letters carry and return our silent voices, and let paper and hands carry out the offices of our tongues.]²⁸

In a similar struggle to construct the illusion of presence and conversational exchange from letters, he demands that an author friend send his work with the following explanation: "so that I may seem to be closer to you through conversation" (*ut videar tecum magis esse loquendo*).²⁹ Moreover, Ovid's exilic poetry contains numerous occasions when the poet inserts the words of the addressee into his letters, either words he imagines his addressee saying or words he implies he has plucked from his addressee's prior missives. By incorporating these words into his epistles alongside his own, the poet introduces a second speaker into the inherently monologic structure of the letter, striving thus to fashion the effect of dialogue.³⁰

Writing letters not only allows correspondents to imagine that they are engaging in dialogue but almost magically conjures up physical apparitions. To yet another friend, Ovid insists that the simple act of composing a letter allows the poet "to see [his addressee's] facial expressions in his mind's eye" (*et videor vultus mente videre tuos*),³¹ and thus create a sense of presence. Reading a letter similarly encourages the illusion of presence as the reader practically summons up the writer before him. So Seneca writes: "Never do I receive a letter from you without our immediately being together" (*Numquam epistulam tuam accipio ut non protinus una simus*).³² And yet, the attempt to alleviate absence can also backfire, leaving the feeling that letters remain inadequate to the task. The effort to foster a sense of actual exchange, and thus attain for the letter the status of dialogic composition, at times comes up short. Contrary to its intentions, the elaborate pretense can instead underscore the fact that the possibility of real, immediate dialogue is foreclosed to the epistolary form. In a nice example, Ovid points to the epistle's failure to manufacture presence successfully when he writes that he desires to feel present among his Roman readership "in any possible way" (*quolibet modo*)³³ and that to fulfill this yearning he therefore sends his epistolary poems. The desperation surrounding his epistolary

act compels us to perceive, and linger over, the absence, even as he claims that his letters dispel the spatial divide. Indeed, the paradoxical tension that a letter both seeks to resemble dialogue and falls short of its goal of simulating such exchange is central to the epistolary genre. Explicitly paraphrasing Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's letters, "Demetrius" claims that the letter is "like one of the two halves of a dialogue."³⁴ It falls, then, upon the writer especially but also upon the reader to decide how fully to give him/herself over to the epistolary illusion of presence and conversational exchange.

In addition to the tension between absence and presence, a second significant feature emerges from a consideration of ancient epistolary texts. The letter appears to be a straightforward, unreconstructed medium revealing the authentic thoughts and emotions of the writer. "Demetrius" explicitly asserts that a writer yields his innermost character in his letters. Discussing ideal content, he claims that an epistle brings to light an image of the writer's soul.³⁵ A similar assumption underlies Seneca's musings that in a letter *te mihi ostendis* ("you [who write] show yourself to me").³⁶ Seneca teases out more fully the seductive notion that a letter provides a window into the writer's heart and mind when he emphasizes how the letter unveils its writer's personality through the very words on the page: *Si imagines nobis amicorum absentium iucundae sunt, quae memoriam renovant et desiderium falso atque inani solacio levant, quanto iucundiores sunt litterae, quae vera amici absentis vestigia, veras notas adferunt* ("if images of our absent friends are sweet to us, images that refresh memory and lighten desire with false and empty solace, how much sweeter is a letter that carries with it true traces, real vestiges of an absent friend?").³⁷ Perhaps the exiled Ovid himself was drawn to the letter form because by its very generic conventions it offered him the means to present the world with a repentant "I." The reader's expectation that an epistle reveal its writer with absolute honesty would shelter Ovid's motives for such a self-portrait from too close scrutiny.

And yet, let us consider for a moment the extent to which the letter really does unveil the true, innermost character of its writer. Certainly the letter accords to its writer a medium for the subjective narration of events and emotions. She possesses the authority to arrange the narrative as she sees fit, in agreement with

her own perspective on events. She can highlight as significant whichever details she chooses. Conversely, she has the power to suppress whatever she desires to remain unspoken or unemphasized. Without the impediment of an ordering, external narrating voice that might accord to her tale secondary status, curbing its length and de-accentuating its importance, the letter writer receives an opportunity to reveal her own character. The epistle does indeed provide a glimpse of the writer's soul but not because the writer reveals her "true self." Rather, each letter allows its writer to offer a self-portrait, a version of herself that she has carefully constructed and edited.³⁸ Ovid himself, as Gareth Williams has compellingly argued, exploits the generic possibilities of self-representation that epistolary composition grants. Williams demonstrates that Ovid's exile poetry proffers to its readers not some underlying "reality" about Tomis and the wretchedly exiled poet, but instead multiple, highly literary constructions of self, geography, and addressees.³⁹

Even though no external voice places constraints on the letter writer, nevertheless epistolary conventions dictate that she does not enjoy sole control over her text. She cannot simply represent herself as she chooses; the addressee comes to bear on her self-construction. She must fashion a narrative and a self-representation that remain believable, with events and characteristics that fall with certain parameters of what her reader expects, finds credible, and further, wishes to hear. Here we hit upon a second stumbling block to the notion that a letter reveals the inner core of its writer in an uncomplicated manner. The reader, although absent, plays a powerful role in shaping the written account, lurking within the epistle, a constant preoccupation for the writer, to some extent determining how the writer will shape the material. "Demetrius" claims that the letter must be composed with greater care than ordinary discourse since it fulfills the function of a gift from the sender to the addressee.⁴⁰ Moreover, writing about the proper tone for an epistle, he continues: "It is right to have regard to the person to whom the letter is addressed."⁴¹ The reader becomes "a determinant of the letter's message" for the writer "simultaneously seeks to affect his reader and is affected by him."⁴² The writer, in the act of composing, considers the reader, seeking to construct herself and her story in a fashion that will provoke the desired response in her addressee.

Moreover, one should note here that two different types of reader constrain the letter writer since many letters, especially literary ones, boast an internal reader or addressee who belongs to the internal world of the text, as well as external readers, the larger reading public, to whom the text is no less directed.⁴³ Not only does the writer offer a version of herself to her immediate addressee, but especially in the case of literary letters, she looks "over the shoulder" of her addressee to an (or multiple) external reader(s). In this way her concern with inspiring the reaction she wants in her external reader also renders the writer's epistolary self-presentation less a matter of "reality," and more an actively fashioned narrative. Since both Cicero and Seneca composed their "private" correspondence at least partly with an eye to eventual publication, the knowledge that their epistolary communications were actually literary compositions for a reading public beyond the internal addressee could not have but shaped what they wrote and how they presented themselves. Similarly, the writer's sharp focus on the external reader offers an explanation for the tone in much of Ovid's epistolary work from exile. Despite his variety of addressees, the poet quite insistently portrays himself as wretched, repentant, and guiltier of a mistake than of any treasonous act. This monotonous self-representation makes sense when one considers that Augustus stands as a quasi omnipresent external reader to whom the poet's words are most certainly directed. Indeed, Augustus remains so firmly within Ovid's sights as he composes his epistles that in one remarkable letter the *princeps* causes the immediate epistolary framework to break down. Writing to Cotta Maximus in *Epistulae Ex Ponto* 2.8, Ovid slips into a "you" form of address to designate not his internal reader but rather Augustus, or, more precisely, his portrait, explicitly acknowledging his implicit preoccupation.⁴⁴

An awareness of how the various readers of an epistolary composition shape what the writer puts down on paper should not, however, make us entirely lose sight of the writer's power to shape her own narrative. A tension between writer and readers for control over the presentation remains a component of any letter.⁴⁵ While at times the reader exerts more power over the writer's narrative and self-portrait, and thus the writer presents herself more according to her perception of what the reader wants to hear than according to "reality," at other times the

writer herself weaves her fictions for her own purposes. As we have seen, by generic convention the letter writer, unencumbered by an "objective," external narrator, has the opportunity to tell her story as she chooses. Moreover, a glance at literary letters prior to the *Heroides*, as well as Ovid's own recommendations for writing love notes in the *Ars Amatoria*, reveals that deceit on the part of the writer is a very common epistolary phenomenon. Often we discover the letter writer in ancient literature manufacturing her story and her own character within it, and not simply by massaging the "facts" to her advantage, but instead by deliberately employing out-and-out deception.

We now move away from the "theoretical" conventions of the epistolary genre in our search to establish Ovid's generic framework for the *Heroides*.⁴⁶ Themes and ideas recurrent in literary letters before the *Heroides* serve to create yet further expectations that have a bearing on our understanding of the Ovidian collection. From its very first appearance in Greek literature the letter, especially one written by a woman and whose subject matter is erotic (i.e., the one most salient to a study of the *Heroides*), ties itself closely with deceit.⁴⁷ In the sixth book of the *Iliad*,⁴⁸ we hear the story of Bellerophon who carries with him an epistolary death warrant for a crime he never committed. During Bellerophon's visit to king Proteus, the king's wife, Anteia, conceives an adulterous passion for her husband's guest. When Bellerophon refuses her proposition, Anteia seeks revenge by claiming to her husband that his guest attempted to seduce her against her will. She demands Bellerophon's death, and Proteus obliges, or so he believes, by sending Bellerophon to Anteia's father armed with a sealed letter demanding that his father-in-law kill the bearer of the missive. Although Anteia does not actually write the letter in her own hand, by fabricating a tale for her husband and then asking for Bellerophon's death, "in essence [she] dictates its contents."⁴⁹ Anteia's narrative of attempted rape and her own self-portrait as innocent victim both reveal the letter's potential as an instrument of feminine deceit.⁵⁰

Following Homer's lead, Euripides returns to, and explores further, the theme of the deceitful letter. In the *Hippolytus* he elaborates on the epistle's dangerous potential in the hands of a woman whose erotic advances have been repulsed. Phaedra, wife of Theseus, desires her stepson, the chaste Hippolytus. Cajoled

by her nurse she confesses her desires, which the nurse then reveals to Hippolytus, who violently rebuffs his stepmother's passion.⁵¹ Angry and full of shame, Phaedra decides to commit suicide, but not before leaving behind a letter that will incriminate her too arrogant stepson.⁵² Revealing its generic connection to the letter in the sixth book of the *Iliad*, but this time written in the woman's own hand, Phaedra's note accuses Hippolytus of sexual assault.⁵³ And again, in a manner that draws on Homer's epic but here placing the spotlight firmly on the woman by removing the male writing intermediary, the letter becomes Phaedra's vehicle for deception, as the stepmother invents out of whole cloth both the story of her rape and her role as assault victim.

In *Iphigenia at Aulis* the tragedian again explores the connection between deception and letter, although this time the writer is male. The movement of the tragedy centers on two duplicitous letters written by Agamemnon to his wife. The first, composed and dispatched before the action of the play, requested that Clytemnestra send their daughter, Iphigenia, to Aulis. In order to procure favorable sailing winds for the army that he commands, Agamemnon is informed that he must sacrifice his daughter to Artemis. Understanding that Iphigenia's mother would never accept the loss of her child's life for the greater good of the Greek military expedition, the king must find a pretext under which to get Iphigenia to Aulis. As Agamemnon turns to deceit to achieve his aims, he communicates by letter, inventing a narrative for his wife about celebrating Iphigenia's marriage to Achilles before the Greek fleet sets sail for Troy.⁵⁴ The king, however, repents of his earlier decision, and attempts to undo the damage by sending a second message to his wife. Once again he writes a letter, this time instructing Clytemnestra to disregard the instructions in the first missive. This second epistle too, however, features the writer's deceit as Agamemnon manages to pass over in silence the fact that the original letter and its promise of a marriage to Achilles were entirely fabricated.⁵⁵

In addition to questions about the intimate connection between duplicity and letter writing, the Euripidean tragedies, once again taking their cue from Homer yet exploring the issue in more depth, examine the power of the epistolary writer to produce an authoritative narrative. Phaedra's suicide letter to her husband accuses Hippolytus of a crime he vehemently denies.

When Theseus calls down a curse upon his son, refusing to listen to Hippolytus' claims of his innocence,⁵⁶ the letter and its dead writer achieve the power to control the entire plot of the tragedy; Phaedra's written words lead directly to the death of Hippolytus and then to Theseus' crushing remorse. The letter writer, however, does not always enjoy such verbal authority. On the contrary, *Iphigenia at Aulis* denies the fantasy of complete writerly control. The tragedy offers its audience the very tantalizing possibility that one letter may have the awesome power to transform the outcome of a traditional story and thus foil the audience's expectations based on long literary history for the conclusion. When he pens his second epistle asking Clytemnestra to keep Iphigenia at home, Agamemnon strives to circumvent the fate that belongs to his daughter in the literary tradition. His attempts fail; Euripides does not grant this letter writer the ability to control the narrative through his words in the same masterful way Phaedra does. The possibility, here unfulfilled, however, that the letter writer could radically alter the course of the story well-known from prior literary tradition will be of great interest to us when we move to our reading of the *Heroides*.

Ovid himself, a keen student of Greek literature, quite explicitly draws attention to the connection between duplicity and epistolary narrative in literature. He also revisits the fantasy of the letter writer's total control over the outcome of the story. While the deception remains on a much smaller scale than that demonstrated by the Homeric or Euripidean characters, Ovid advocates deceit as a primary component of writing love letters for both men and women. In the *Ars Amatoria* the poet offers two books of advice for men pursuing love affairs, and follows with one book addressed to women. For both sexes the letter serves as a choice weapon of seduction, and the poet instructs all writers to shun epistolary honesty. In order to pique a man's erotic interest, Ovid explains to his female readership, you must not portray yourself as you are; rather, you must construct yourself as a certain type of woman within a certain type of scenario. A woman must never seem too eager, nor yet too distant.⁵⁷ No matter how strongly she feels about her potential lover she should respond to his letters only after a "brief delay" (*breve[m] . . . moram*);⁵⁸ under no circumstances should she present herself as "easy" (*facile[m]*).⁵⁹ On the contrary she must walk a fine line, simultaneously inspiring

both fear and hope in her lover with each missive, but ultimately giving more and more cause for hope and less and less for fear as the correspondence progresses.⁶⁰ Men too, Ovid claims, must present themselves to their lovers not honestly, but instead according to a specific profile. Seeking to win over a woman, a man must construct a narrative of his own sincerity. Rather ironically, he must accomplish this feat through deceit, by bringing to bear his extensive rhetorical training⁶¹ and, more precisely, by unleashing upon his addressee pure and unabashed flattery.⁶²

Ovid holds up Acontius as a man's model for success through epistolary deceit.⁶³ Desperately in love with Cydippe, Acontius seeks to achieve his fantasy of marrying her. He carves an oath into an apple and tosses the fruit toward his beloved. She picks it up and reads the words aloud. Unwittingly she swears to join herself in marriage to nobody other than Acontius, a man she has not even met but who has just managed, rather duplicitously, to bind her to him by means of his written words. This story, told first by Callimachus (*Aetia* fragments 67–75) and then by Ovid himself through letters in the double *Heroides* (20–21), reveals not only the deceitful nature of letters but further the tantalizing fantasy offered by an epistolary composition that the writer can achieve total control. When Cydippe, despite her best efforts to bring about a different result, finally must break down and marry Acontius because of the binding oath written out for her by Acontius that she read aloud and thus swore, the reader witnesses Acontius' power "through writing to fulfill his own desire."⁶⁴

Before we move on from our considerations of the conventions and commonplaces of epistolary fiction that will inform our reading of the *Heroides*, let us briefly turn our attention to one final literary letter that holds special interest for us because of its date, its form, and its content. In his final and innovative book of elegies, Propertius composes one poem in letter form. Elegy 4.3. presents the epistolary voice of a young wife, Arethusa, to her husband, Lycotas, long absent from home because he has been off fighting in his country's wars. Arethusa's missive participates in many of the expectations for an epistolary text that we have been discussing. A desire for her husband's presence pervades the letter. In fact, a reading of poem 4.3 shows that epistolary communication constitutes one of the various ways in which Arethusa attempts to imagine herself with her husband. She pictures him

vividly as she writes, visually constructing him for herself with evidence she collects from others⁶⁵ or through images she conjures up from military progress reports.⁶⁶ She creates the illusion of his presence for herself by seeking out traces of him where she can. She claims that she kisses the weapons he has left at home,⁶⁷ and that she follows the army's advances on maps.⁶⁸ And yet, although she strives to manufacture his presence, her letter greatly emphasizes his absence. Her epistle opens with a pointed reference to Lycotas' sojourn away from Rome. She addresses him as her husband, and then pauses to wonder about the appropriateness of such an appellation for one so long absent.⁶⁹ When she declares that she is currently at work weaving his fourth cloak, the information serves to highlight the fact that he has now been away the same number of years.⁷⁰ Moreover, the image that Arethusa presents of herself as "weaver" should not escape the notice of the reader armed with epistolary expectations. Not only does she claim to have spun four cloaks but she works with her husband in mind at night (*noctibus*)⁷¹ in the (emphatically female) company of only her sister and her nurse.⁷² Making good use of the letter writer's opportunity for self-representation, in conjunction with her understanding of what the internal reader, her absent husband, will want to hear, Arethusa proffers herself as Penelope reincarnate.⁷³

Propertius 4.3 is an especially important text for us because of its striking conceptual similarities to the *Heroides*. The Ovidian heroines will also use the epistolary form in elegiac meter to lament their erotic abandonment to the very heroes who have left them, drawing, as Arethusa does, on both the epistle's conventions and its prior literary history to make their case. It remains difficult to assess with certainty which poet influenced the other, and indeed it seems counterproductive to attempt to determine whether one poet "copied" the other.⁷⁴ Ovid himself, however, speaks of his friendship with Propertius,⁷⁵ thus introducing the possibility that they discussed their work or shared ideas. How tantalizing, then, to imagine the two poets exploring together the generic expectations a reader would bring to an epistolary text, and the suitability of the genre for the words of a woman in love.⁷⁶ In any case, Propertius 4.3 serves well to reinforce our sense that Ovid was keenly aware of the possibilities inherent in an epistolary text both generically and through its use in prior literature;

for the Arethusa letter-elegy shows that Propertius, Ovid's friend and contemporary, was too.

In this section we have examined the use of the epistle in literature prior to the *Heroides*, as well as Ovid's own conceptions of the form (in works other than in the *Heroides*), seeking not to exhaust the possibilities for epistolary writing but rather to set forth a series of expectations that will be significant for our reading of the *Heroides*. As we turn toward the Ovidian collection of letters we shall consider how the poet generates textual meaning as he draws on the conventions and expectations for an epistolary text that we have set forth. More specifically, we shall look at how Ovid's heroines manipulate the conventions of letters to construct their self-representations. We shall explore the use they make of a central paradox of the letter, the writer's desire to erase the absence between herself and her addressee, an absence that the very need for a letter underscores. We shall examine closely the ways in which the classic tension between the power of the writer and that of the reader in an epistolary text features in the *Heroides*. How do Ovid's heroines make use of the opportunity for subjective narration? Do they follow in the footsteps of their literary predecessors and write duplicitously? How exactly do they represent themselves, and to what extent do they achieve control over their stories? The themes, tropes, and generic conventions of epistolary texts in prior literature will guide and enrich our reading of the abandoned heroines' words.

MAIL AND FEMALE: LETTER-WRITING AND THE *HEROIDES*

A physical separation from the beloved plagues each heroine in the *Heroides*, driving her to take up pen and paper. She has been abandoned, left behind alone on a deserted island or at home while her beloved has gone off to war, or has undertaken labors, perhaps a heroic quest, or has, quite simply, grown tired of her. An enemy has stolen her away from her beloved who has refused, or has been unable, to achieve her speedy return. Her lover spurns her for someone or something (chastity, a homecoming) else. The absence of the man she loves, the absence that is the prerequisite for any letter, propels her composition. In an attempt to conjure up the presence of her beloved, to mask the distance (spatial and/or emotional) separating the two of them, the heroine composes an epistle that addresses him as if he were

at hand for a dialogue. And yet, she highlights the variety of ways in which her own epistle fails to erase the divide rather than the ways in which it successfully manufactures the sense of presence she so desires.

Ovid has not created the heroines he chooses to portray in this work; the reader knows the stories of the women from prior tellings. In one striking way, however, the *Heroides* are not complicit with the long tradition of representation in epic and in tragedy where these heroines occupy marginal roles as secondary characters.⁷⁷ The writer of each letter receives the long deferred chance to occupy center stage, possessing, as every letter writer does, the opportunity to narrate her own story from her own subjective perspective. The very plausible choice of epistolary composition further accentuates the possibility that we shall hear an authentic female voice.⁷⁸

As we have seen in the previous section on epistolarity, when she tells her version of the story in which she plays a part, each heroine in Ovid's *Heroides* has a chance, granted by the conventions of the genre in which she writes, to structure the occurrences within the account as she chooses to highlight or to obscure them. Readers of the text differ in their interpretations of why the poet picked a genre that showcases each heroine's subjective vision. Some believe that Ovid, collapsing contemporary and mythological time in order to point to the universality either of the female psyche or of female suffering over lost love, employs this perspective to depict a psychological portrait of women in general.⁷⁹ Other critical views see the poet's purpose in the sharp and pointed contrast between the heroine's subjective perspective on the story in which she is a character and the "objective" traditional telling. Does he thus seek to explore the relative nature of reality by demonstrating how the construction of reality shifts depending on perspective?⁸⁰ Or does he struggle to reinforce the reader's acceptance of the "objective" perspective of the dominant text?⁸¹ Along the same lines but with an emphasis on humor, another interpreter proposes that Ovid wishes to display his wit by creating such a gap between the traditional telling and the heroine's own heartrending story that the reader who has felt sympathy for the woman is compelled to step back and laugh at herself for succumbing to the heroine's (faulty) perception of events.⁸² Yet other scholars argue that subjectivity

grants a creative power to the women; the heroines thus become artists who possess the much-coveted opportunity to delineate their own self-portraits.⁸³

The subjective nature of epistolary writing does indeed grant to each heroine the chance to mold her character. An examination of the letters, however, shows that the women make a rather startling choice for self-representation. Through our readings of individual epistles we shall see how the heroines carefully and consciously manipulate the conventions and commonplaces of literary epistles with the result that they systematically close down the self-enhancing possibilities the letter offers its writer. We shall concentrate in particular on how the heroine chooses to dismantle the classic and generically mandated tension between the power of the writer and that of the reader over the presentation of the letter's narrative content. Fashioning her own narrative to present a story that will win favor with her addressee, the heroine relegates herself to her familiar position in the margins of the tale, at times even managing to erase from her self-portrait the traces of authority that belonged to her character (if any did) in the prior text. Moreover, she shifts into the central role the absent hero who retains his prevailing characteristics from the traditional telling, still marked by the attributes of plenitude and power. In her own epistolary telling the heroine imagines her own story with the hero as its protagonist; he provides the point of reference for her self-definition. She insists on being "defined by the lover she addresses. . . . In amorous epistolary discourse, the heroine always locates herself—spatially, temporally, emotionally—vis-à-vis the beloved."⁸⁴ The heroine does, writes, devises all for her empowered addressee, who is constantly in her mind, constantly providing her with motivation and meaning. Choosing to remain primarily preoccupied with the impact she imagines her words will have on the absent hero, with what she believes he wants to hear, she does not highlight her own power as writer over the shape of the material, but instead grants her addressee control over how and what she writes.

Ovid further erases the doubleness at the heart of an epistolary text, much to the detriment of the heroine. Every letter comes to some sort of closure, or, at least, to some sort of an end when the writer puts down her pen. And yet, the generic structure of an epistle allows for the possibility that the closure is impermanent,

not absolute. The writer can always follow up each letter with another since, as half of a dialogue, the writer, although hoping to provoke an exchange, does not require the words and responses of her addressee to sustain her own portion, or perhaps her own illusion, of the conversation. This lack of a fixed and determined closing point enables the letter form to function well as a means to express desire, which in itself "is infinitely transcribable, yet ultimately elusive, and is therefore reiterated ceaselessly."⁸⁵ Indeed, characteristic of the one who desires, especially in the *Heroides*, is a refusal to impose an end, to force closure, upon desire.

Some argue that, through this lack of closure, the heroine opens up for herself the possibility of writing letter upon letter to her beloved, ceaselessly speaking her desire. In her discussion of the *Heroides*, Linda Kauffman suggests that for each abandoned heroine, desire must, and will, be constantly reiterated. In this way, each time a woman threatens suicide on account of her unfulfilled desire, Kauffman insists that such a threat is merely a rhetorical ploy, one weapon in her infinite arsenal intended to bring about a satisfaction of her desire. She will not kill herself but rather she will compose another epistle. Kauffman writes about each heroine that "the inability to persuade the beloved to return has . . . [the] effect of making the writing go forward, keeping the circuit of desire open";⁸⁶ about Dido in particular she explains that "suicide is depicted as a threat, a rhetorical strategy she uses merely to persuade Aeneas to return. . . . She doesn't die at the end but remains alive, discoursing about her desire."⁸⁷

While the idea of "infinitely transcribable" desire is tantalizing, the problems I see here are multiple. First of all, on the most literal level, the *Heroides* as a collection contain only one letter from each heroine to the absent hero, and for this reason it is misleading to speak of writing other letters that follow the first one. Secondly, while it is true that heroines like Phyllis, Dido, or Deianira who threaten suicide do not actually follow through with their threats during the course of their letters—(and one wonders how exactly this would work)—other tellings of the stories with which the reader is conversant furnish the endings for Ovid's text. This is especially troubling in the case of Dido, since a monumental precursor exists for her character. To me, it seems inconceivable that any reader should not assume that she will drive the Trojan sword, Aeneas' gift to her, through her body.

And yet, here we should momentarily touch upon the potentially subversive notion that Duncan F. Kennedy speaks about as "temporality." Kennedy contends that there exists a two-fold chronology in the *Heroides* that depends on whom we regard as "author" of each letter.⁸⁸ Conceding authorship to Ovid, we grant temporal anteriority to the prior tellings of the story. Ovid writes his heroines after Euripides or Catullus, for example, fashions his. But, conversely, the versions of Homer, Virgil, and Sophocles fall into place as later episodes to the heroines' narratives, if we choose to see the women as authors of the *Heroides*. In other words, the prior text offers a glimpse of future events that will unfold *after* the heroine's tale (the one in the *Heroides*) comes to its conclusion.⁸⁹

On the one hand, as Kennedy claims, such temporal manipulation could grant great strength to the heroine. If, in fact, her text is actually first, the possibility does present itself for her to contradict the great literary sources that contain her narrative. She can compose a variant version. And indeed, as we have seen, epistolary moments in texts prior to the *Heroides* suggest it is perhaps within the power of the author to alter the plot line as s/he sees fit. On the other hand, however, I believe that a close examination of the various Ovidian epistles reveals that the heroines do not avail themselves of this opportunity. Rather than struggling against the tellings that the prior texts have provided in an effort to rewrite their stories, the heroines choose to inhabit their traditional, recognizable selves and stories.⁹⁰ Unlike Acontius, the heroine will not force the story line to turn out as she desires through her writing. This outcome is all the more striking if we recognize the opportunity on which the heroines turn their backs.

Let us now return to notions of closure and desire with which, we discover on close observation, Ovid plays throughout the collection as well as within the individual epistle. He does not demonstrate that it is a characteristic of desire to be "ceaselessly reiterated" with the possibility that each individual heroine will continue writing forever. Rather, the collection as a whole serves this purpose. The fact that each heroine tells the same story of unfulfilled desire in the same voice with the same language becomes the way to express the "infinitely transcribable" and "ceaselessly reitera[ble]" nature of desire. Furthermore, the open-endedness

of each letter, created through the silence, or lack of response, of the absent hero, draws the external reader into the text. Since she brings to her reading of the Ovidian text a knowledge acquired through the readings of other, prior tellings of these abandoned women and of their stories from beginning to end, she realizes that no letter ever reaches its destination, that the attempt of each abandoned heroine to connect with the hero who has deserted her is futile. She furnishes the text with its conclusion, caught in what Barchiesi has called "the acceptance of a master fiction which controls us."⁹¹ The reader has the uncomfortable task of providing the missing closure. Once again in the *Heroides*, the power of the reader by far outweighs that of the writer.

One by one the heroines manipulate the generic conventions of the epistle to their own detriment. They make use of the genre's rules and the recurring themes and tropes of epistles in prior literature to present themselves as marginal and helpless, especially in comparison with their hero-lovers (or husbands) whom they choose to portray as powerful. But here a reader armed with expectations drawn from prior literary epistles, especially those written by women and erotic in nature, will rightly consider the tight link between letter writing and duplicity. To what degree are the heroines actively engaged in practices of deceit, duplicitous games of rhetorical persuasion, as they fashion their narratives and their self-portraits? To attempt to answer this question, however, we shall have to wait until the second chapter where we shall turn away from our focus on epistolarity to concentrate on the second generic component of the *Heroides*, elegy. Elegy suggests that the heroine's tale will be a narrative of desire, and, in this light, new aspects beyond self-marginalization and self-deprecation appear in the heroines' self-portraits. But let us begin by looking at the specific ways in which the heroines fashion their helplessness and insignificance through their letters.

Readings of *Heroides* 1, 3, and 9

I now turn from theoretical discussions of epistolary composition, and concentrate on three epistles that I believe most clearly reveal how the Ovidian heroines make use of its various generic

aspects. I find Penelope, Briseis, and Deianira especially compelling because they belong as identifiable heroines to genres that traditionally enjoy the highest standing in the canonical hierarchy of genres—epic and tragedy. The reader knows at least the primary prior text from which each of the three women emerges as a character, if not also a number of the narrative's variant versions. Through a comparison of each heroine as she appears in the prior text with the same heroine as she creates her own narrative in Ovid's text, the poet's use of his chosen genre becomes clear. Obviously the possibility of retelling the same story fascinated Ovid; after all, the poet himself celebrates Ulysses by reveling in the Ithacan's storytelling ability: *ille referre aliter saepe solebat idem* ("he was accustomed to retelling the same thing otherwise").⁹² I seek to clarify here the manner in which Ovid achieves his retellings in the *Heroides* through a manipulation of the generic conventions of epistolarity.

I am not the first to consider an intertextual approach fruitful to an interpretation of the Ovidian heroines' stories. In fact, most analyses of the *Heroides*, at some level at least, take into account the relationship Ovid creates between the heroine's epistle and the "source text" on which the letter draws. My approach, however, yields a significantly different reading from the majority of intertextual interpretations by emphasizing how the changes that occur between prior tellings and Ovidian narrative affect the portrayal of the heroine. I am not primarily concerned, therefore, with the same issues that engage many intertextual interpreters—the poet's production of irony with a wink to his reader,⁹³ or his masterly manipulation of generic codes as he transfers a story from one generic register to another,⁹⁴ or his putting into question "subjective" and "objective" storytelling.⁹⁵ Rather, in the readings that follow, I seek to focus on the contrast between the presentation of the heroine in the "source text" and her epistolary self-representation in the *Heroides*. I am particularly interested in the opportunities for self-representation generically inherent in an epistolary text and in the possibilities for self-fashioning based on recent feminist interpretations of the women as they appear in the "source texts." As the heroines turn their backs on all manner of opportunities for strong self-representation, we must remember Ovid who animates their voices and call into question the textual illusion that the poet so

carefully constructs: that he presents us, in the *Heroides*, with authentic female voices.

PENELOPE TO ULYSSES: *HEROIDES* 1

Ovid opens the *Heroides* by self-consciously selecting the most famous heroine from the most traditional literary genre to occupy the programmatic position at the head of his collection. Penelope writes to her long absent husband Ulysses.⁹⁶ A letter offers her the illusion of communicating with him and therefore epistolary composition becomes a frequent activity for Penelope. In her epistle she reveals her obsession with obtaining information about, and achieving contact with, her husband. Any wanderer, foreigner, or merchant—*quisquis ad haec vertit peregrinam litora puppim* ("whoever turns his foreign ship to these shores," 59)—must make his way to the palace and answer her questions about the whereabouts and safety of her husband. Moreover, she contrives—by pressing her letters upon these seafaring travelers—to communicate with him directly. In the process she creates a vivid and somewhat absurd image of an inordinate number of men, who, having at one time passed through Ithaca, now carry in their tunic pockets missives written by Penelope to Ulysses that they have been commanded to deliver should they happen someday to encounter him. She explains: *quamque tibi reddat, si te modo viderit usquam, / traditur huic digitis charta notata meis* ("a letter, written in my hand, is given to this man, in order that he may give to you, if only he shall have seen you anywhere," 61–62).⁹⁷

On the one hand, she claims, as the conventions of letter writing allow, to be seeking to dispel the distance between her husband and herself through her epistles. On the other hand, however, she succeeds far more in underlining his absence instead of his presence, the failure to communicate by letters rather than the creation of dialogue. Because Ulysses' absence has been so prolonged, Penelope points out that her attempts to create the illusion of his presence for herself have become excessively frequent and haphazard. It no longer matters whether she believes that the letter will actually reach Ulysses; the fleeting moment of seeming dialogue with her illusively present addressee remains Penelope's cold comfort. With the pathetic uncertainty and hypothetical futurity of *si te modo viderit usquam* ("if only he shall

have seen you anywhere") Penelope chooses to underscore the futility of the letter-writing process rather than its potential to bridge distances. She turns the epistolary genre against herself, highlighting the generic conventions that raise questions about her ability, in a letter, to convey her story to the proper, intended audience.

Heroides 1 seemingly offers Penelope the opportunity to tell the story of the *Odyssey* (in conjunction with other variant versions of the tale) from her own perspective; Ovid's poem cedes center stage to her. The heroine's first order of business in her re-fashioned narrative, however, as we have seen, succeeds in questioning the notion that her preferred narrative form can in fact convey the intended information to the appropriate addressee. Indeed, Penelope continues to erode the authority of her vehicle for self-expression, and therefore, by extension, her own authority as central figure in her story. If "a letter is one of the two halves of a dialogue,"⁹⁸ then often for the writer of a letter, and certainly for Penelope, the ideal condition is a reunion of writer with the absent addressee and a restoration of the ability to conduct a dialogue complete with both its halves. In a theoretical observation about letter writing, Janet Altman explains that "as written dialogue, epistolary discourse is obsessed with its oral model . . . epistolary language is preoccupied with immediacy, with presence, because it is a product of absence."⁹⁹ Generically inherent in the epistle is the privileging of speech over writing. We have seen one possible response to such a privileging in the case of Cicero, Seneca, and even the exiled Ovid. Often the letter writer claims that his written words are equivalent alternatives to spoken ones, attempting to present the epistle as if it were direct speech.¹⁰⁰ Penelope's response will be altogether different. Rather than equating her epistolary composition with oral communication, she manages at every turn to underscore the points of divergence between speech and letter writing. In the process she highlights the superiority of speech. The emphasis on orality becomes particularly interesting in the case of Penelope's epistle not only because she obsessively desires the ability to speak with Ulysses face to face but also because, as we shall see, the primary source upon which Ovid draws for this letter, Homer's *Odyssey*, draws attention to speech as the province of men.

As two recent discussions of *Heroides* 1 have persuasively argued, by juxtaposing the scattered elements of the Ovidian Penelope's tale with the Homeric poem the reader discovers the moment at which the heroine composes her epistle. The suitors for Penelope's hand have long since begun their nightly feasting in the Ithacan palace (87ff). Telemachus has already voyaged to Pylos and to Sparta for information about his father (37ff and 63ff). The foreigner to whom Penelope will deliver her letter, therefore, is none other than Ulysses disguised as a beggar, the next stranger to come along.¹⁰¹ It remains extremely important to keep an awareness of the moment in the story at which Penelope writes her epistle; it colors the entire composition. Let us consider this insight, then, in conjunction with the Ovidian Penelope's obsession with the oral and the written. In her letter the speech/writing dichotomy plays itself out against the backdrop of Telemachus' chastising words to his mother in the first book of the *Odyssey*. He demands that she withdraw from the banquet hall and return to her chamber upstairs. She must leave the bard to sing the song he chooses; indeed Telemachus states emphatically "speech [μῦθος] is a concern to all men [ἄνδρεςσι . . . πᾶσι], but to me most of all; for mine is the power in the house."¹⁰²

From her opening words the Ovidian heroine draws the reader's attention to the opposition she establishes between oral and written, commencing her letter with an emphasis on the fact that she is writing: *Haec tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulix*e ("your Penelope sends this to you Ulysses who are slow," 1). The pentameter rapidly closes the distich with her resounding insistence that Ulysses not write back himself. With the injunction *nil mihi rescribas tu tamen*;¹⁰³ *ipse veni!* ("you, however, write nothing back to me; you yourself come," 2),¹⁰⁴ she sets up a clear polarity between herself, a letter writer, and her husband who, appearing in person, should make use of the opposite medium, oral communication. Indeed, Penelope attributes oral communication as a means of expression to Ulysses throughout the epistle. When she imagines her absent husband in the arms of another woman, she creates a scene in which he narrates—*narre[t]* (77)—to his new love the events of his earlier life. Moreover, the distinction between speech and writing recurs frequently in the letter and widens out after the first distich beyond Penelope and

Ulysses. Penelope alone avails herself of a written method of communication. The men in *Heroides* 1 all communicate orally and are, in sharp contrast to Penelope, successful in conveying information.¹⁰⁵

The fact that Penelope writes, a solitary act in sharp contrast to the profoundly social and interactive function of speech, sets her apart and attracts the reader's attention to this separation. When Penelope at long last receives the opportunity to tell her own story centering on herself as its main character, she employs a written medium, the epistle, and then underscores the rules of the genre that highlight the superiority of dialogue or oral conversation. Establishing an opposition between the written and the spoken word that privileges and empowers speech, Penelope effectively manages to represent herself as marginal and to locate authority with the male, speaking characters mentioned in the letter.

Penelope notes that the warriors returning from Troy narrate their glorious exploits orally to the admiration of their audience, especially of their wives. Somewhat wistfully, Penelope describes a scene where *narrantis coniunx pendet ab ore viri* ("the wife hangs on the words of her husband as he speaks," 30), employing the singular to evoke a generic whole.¹⁰⁶ The closest a man comes to writing in this epistle, indeed, in any of the epistles, occurs when an unidentified *aliquis* ("someone") recreates for his audience the battles before Troy with traces of wine on a table. I suggest, however, that these images resemble more closely the nature of speech than of writing. The lack of permanence of the pictures sketched in wine call to mind the lack of physical record that words leave behind once they have been spoken. Furthermore, in themselves the pictures do not tell the entire story. The artist must complete the narrative of his sketches with oral explanations. In fact, here the *aliquis* tells his audience about the layout of the land, the positioning of important warriors, and the dragging of Hector's corpse (31-36). Once again, a man communicates most significantly through speech.

Throughout the epistle Penelope reveals that she has granted primacy to the medium of oral discourse over the written word. By her own admission she has already sent countless letters to Ulysses. No communication ensues; she acquires no new information about her husband based on responses generated by her

epistles. The warriors who tell stories of war, the *aliquis* who makes sketches on the banquet table in wine, manage to communicate and to interact with their audience. Even her son utilizes oral discourse with successful results. Seeking information about the safety and whereabouts of his father, Telemachus does not take up pen and paper following his mother's example. Rather he makes a journey to Pylos and asks the old king, Nestor, to tell him all he knows about Ulysses. The conversation yields information that the youth then conveys, also orally, to his mother—*rettulerat nato Nestor, at ille mihi* ("Nestor had conveyed information to your son, and he conveyed it to me," 38). Stories narrated by men and tales about men and their deeds belong to the realm of oral discourse. They successfully communicate their point and achieve an exchange of information.

Aware now of Penelope's tendency, within her own composition, and by means of the epistle's generic conventions, to marginalize herself, let us focus more broadly on the heroine's self-portrait in *Heroides* 1. What image does this epistle yield of its writer's soul? A consideration of *Heroides* 1 in conjunction with its primary "source text," the *Odyssey*, offers the opportunity for a careful scrutiny of the Ovidian Penelope's self-characterization. In two separate and fruitful analyses, Duncan Kennedy and Alessandro Barchiesi have probed the intersection of these two narratives. Kennedy compares Penelope's perspective as it appears in Ovid's text with the Homeric account of her story, finding in moments of divergence between the two that the telling of the Ovidian heroine, because of the epistolary genre in which it is written, highlights her very subjective point of view that contrasts with the objective and canonical account of Homer.¹⁰⁷ Barchiesi too juxtaposes Ovid's heroine with her Homeric counterpart, considering how the Ovidian Penelope alters the objective, Homeric text to suit the generic requirements of elegy.¹⁰⁸ For Kennedy the differences allow the reader to question the state of the Ovidian Penelope's mind; for Barchiesi they allow the reader to enjoy Ovidian irony and playful generic manipulation.

I suggest, however, a shift in the emphasis of the intertextual analysis away from poet and reader. In contrast, I focus on what Ovid has done, through the mouthpiece of his Penelope, to the Penelope of the Homeric text, more precisely to the Homeric Penelope as seen through the lens of recent feminist writings that

concentrate on the possibilities present for her character in the epic. My interpretation seeks to point out the results for Penelope of Ovid's retelling of her story. An examination of just how Ovid reformulates the heroine allows the reader to begin the process of considering what is at stake when the male poet assumes the female voice.

Recent critical interpretations of the *Odyssey* devote much attention to the figure of Penelope. Although at the margins of the central narrative about the hero Odysseus, the Homeric heroine nevertheless enjoys a compelling, if secondary, role in the text. Marilyn Katz argues that a pervasive feeling of "indeterminacy" surrounds Penelope in the epic.¹⁰⁹ Her husband has been absent from home during the ten-year-long Trojan War and then, inexplicably, for ten more years after the Greek victory. To what extent does the heroine revel in the presence of the many contenders for her hand in a new marriage? Why does she mourn the death of her pet geese in her dream, even after the murdering eagle announces that he represents her husband returning home and taking his revenge on the suitors, here figured as geese? Why does she choose to display herself before the suitors in Book 18, and why does she decide to set a marriage contest, promising herself as a bride to the man who can successfully shoot an arrow from Odysseus' bow through a series of axes? Indeed, has Penelope actually recognized her husband despite his disguise as the beggar (or come to the point that she feels almost certain that the stranger is, in fact, Odysseus)? Does she, therefore, cunningly plot along with Odysseus the revenge on the suitors through the contest, on the assumption that no one but Odysseus himself possesses the ability to manipulate the immense bow?¹¹⁰ In addition, what should the audience or the reader make of the recurrent, suggestive mentions of Clytemnestra and Helen in the Homeric text? How do the repeated allusions to the two notorious women, paradigmatic respectively for slaughtering a husband and for committing adultery, reflect on the characterization of the *Odyssey's* heroine as ostensibly chaste and loyal?¹¹¹

The Homeric text offers no definite answers to these questions. The various interpretive possibilities and the ensuing ambiguity, however, lend strength and authority to the character of Penelope. In part because of the existence of the external, third person narrator, in part because of the infrequency with which the text

offers Penelope's perspective on events, and in part because of a forced wariness aroused by the knowledge of the heroine's characteristic *μητις* ("cleverness"), Penelope keeps the reader off balance yet (therefore?) intrigued. As if in response to the possibilities present in the Homeric text, Ovid, in *Heroides* 1, seems to offer the heroine an opportunity for self-definition, for autobiography. The subjective perspective of a letter suggests that Penelope's thoughts are no longer foreclosed to the reader. Even though she must erase the mysterious and powerful indeterminacy of her Homeric incarnation, still, in painting a self-portrait, she possesses a chance to weave a narrative, to characterize herself and her addressee. The heroine of *Heroides* 1 chooses to emphasize her own lack, helplessness, and marginality, while creating Ulysses, a man whom she has neither seen nor spoken to in twenty years, in terms of centrality and power. In bold strokes she sets aside the generic possibility that the letter writer might shape her narrative as she sees fit, deciding instead to highlight the constraints that the addressee places on the writer regarding the epistle's contents. Penelope demonstrates how strongly what she believes her addressee wants to hear influences her composition.

The opening of her epistle suggests a potential complicity with the portions of the *Odyssey* that emphasize the daily struggles of Penelope. Gone is the central vantage point in the *Odyssey* from which the audience rejoices in a story of heroic, victorious warriors and their difficult journey to return home. Rather, the Ovidian Penelope begins by asserting her own perspective on the expedition against Troy, the perspective of a warrior's wife left at home while her husband risks his life in combat. This leads potentially to a vigorous and marked questioning of the characterizations and ideals inherent in the traditional renditions of the Trojan War. Ten years after the sack of the city, she has heard about, or imagined, the joyous homecomings of many Greek warriors as well as the resulting happiness of their wives.¹¹² She is besieged within her very palace by rapacious suitors seeking her hand in marriage and slowly eating their way through Ulysses' wealth (87–96). She is also trying to raise her son who, she believes, requires the advice and teachings of his father (108), all the while being badgered by her own father to abandon hope that Ulysses remains alive, and to choose for herself a new husband (81–83). For this woman the various tellings of victory in

the Trojan War with their emphasis on the eternal glory acquired by the warriors has very little meaning. For her, *vix Priamus tanti totaque Troia fuit* ("Priam and all Troy were hardly worth so much," 4). Again, about forty lines later, the same feelings surface. Rhetorically she asks, *sed mihi quid prodest vestris disiecta laceratis / Ilios et, murus quod fuit, esse solum, / si maneo, qualis Troia durante manebam* ("what use is it to me that Troy was destroyed by your arms and that what once was wall is now ground if I remain as I was when Troy stood?" 47–49), revealing her despair, and simultaneously pointing to the subjective perspective of which she now avails herself to tell a familiar narrative.¹¹³ No longer does the focus lie on Ulysses, on the fighters, on κλέος ("everlasting glory") but rather on Penelope, bereft of her husband. From her point of view, what does she have to celebrate?

Although she flirts with the possibility that she will, in fact, assert herself as the primary character in her subjective narrative, the Ovidian Penelope's statements regarding the events at Troy place greater emphasis on a re-reading of the Homeric text that serves to remove from her character its original authority and importance. The *Odyssey* upholds the notion that the achievement of κλέος comes for those legendary heroes whose valiant exploits on the battlefield find a complement in a safe homecoming.¹¹⁴ The result of this Odyssean correlation between νόστος ("homecoming") and κλέος is an enormous importance accorded to the figure of Penelope.¹¹⁵ Penelope ensures her husband's κλέος by allowing him a safe return into the home. The Ovidian Penelope, however, seems to be formatting her words according to the wrong Homeric text. Refusing her own importance in the Odyssean notion of κλέος, she focuses instead on martial glory so central to that other Homeric poem, the *Iliad*. This results in the establishment of a heroic, central role for Ulysses and, for herself, a scramble to insert herself into his warrior-story.

Her thoughts linger long on the topic of the Trojan War.¹¹⁶ Since the Greek warriors had returned home long before she composes this particular letter, Penelope possesses concrete facts that lend substance to her imaginings. Five distichs as the poem opens (13–22) disclose her visions of the war. As Howard Jacobson aptly remarks, "each distich moves from the plains of Troy to the mind of Penelope," and he further points out that the movement consists of a hexameter about Troy and a pentameter about

Penelope's reaction to the war.¹¹⁷ Indeed the hexameter, epic meter *par excellence*, sets forth a heroic occurrence of the Trojan expedition. The pentameter, which makes the couplet elegiac, sets out the more personal reaction that Penelope has to the heroic narrative. Thus she makes an effort to include herself, albeit tangentially, in the activities that occupy her husband and keep him absent from her. By emphasizing thus Ulysses' exploits at Troy, she establishes the Iliadic model for the acquisition of κλέος. She herself has no access to this glory. The best she can do is to insert herself into the margins of the activities that Ulysses undertakes and thus to create herself as a peripheral character in a story, *her* story, that revolves around him.

In fact, her concern with Ulysses' activities provides Ovid's Penelope with several ways to erode her own importance while simultaneously enhancing her addressee's. Overwhelmed by her situation in Ithaca, Homer's heroine has her hands full. Although after twenty years she laments nightly the long absence of her husband, the tears the Homeric Penelope sheds are for herself, for her loss. When she is not weeping, she struggles to hold the suitors at bay and strives to keep control of her own life. In stark contrast, a considerable portion of the letter that the Ovidian Penelope composes to her husband concerns itself with the Trojan War and its aftermath—in other words, with *Ulysses'* story.

When Ovid's Penelope chooses to put down on paper her thoughts and feelings about the last twenty years, she places her emphasis squarely upon events concerning him. When she divulges her sentiments and actions, they do not depend on occurrences at home as often as upon those at Troy. She claims that she spends her time in Ithaca consumed with imaginings of her husband's life and exploits—in *te fingebam violentos Troas ituros* ("I used to imagine violent Trojans about to attack you," 13). After the return of the victorious Greek forces from Troy, she no longer possesses solid information upon which to base her imaginings of his daily experiences, and she complains that if Troy still stood at least *scirem ubi pugnares, et tantum bella timerem* ("I would know where you were fighting and I would fear only battles," 69). No matter, she spends her time inventing potential dangers awaiting him, with the explanation: *quaecumque aequor habet, quaecumque pericula tellus, / tam longae causas suspicor esse*

morae ("whatever dangers the water, whatever dangers the earth holds, I suspect that they are the causes of such a long delay," 73–74). But her mind does not linger over war and obstacles to safe travel alone; underscoring the immense amount of time she devotes to thinking about him, she even fashions sexual adventures for him. She conjures up the picture of Ulysses holding a new lover spellbound with belittling stories about his wife (75–78), *rustica coniunx*, / *quae tantum lanas non sinat esse rudes* ("a provincial wife of the sort who only cares that the wool not be coarse," 77–78).¹¹⁸

As she meticulously crafts her letter to demonstrate how much thoughts of her addressee determine what she writes, the Ovidian Penelope actively plays down the importance of her own character even in her self-representation. Although few and far between, there are two significant moments in the *Odyssey* when Homer grants Penelope something of a chance at self-characterization. In Book 19, during her encounter at the hearth with Odysseus disguised as a beggar, she narrates for him the cunning plan she masterminded in order to hold her suitors at bay.¹¹⁹ She introduces the story of the shroud for Laertes, her father-in-law, with the striking statement: "I accomplish deceits."¹²⁰ She promised, once she completed the garment, to select a husband from among the suitors. Proudly she tells the beggar how by day she wove industriously, while each night secretly she undid her daily progress. The second time she divulges specific information about herself she again speaks to Odysseus, now no longer in disguise, about the suitors. After the scene of recognition and the long-awaited reunion, husband and wife exchange narratives of their lives during the twenty years of separation. Penelope, creating the image of herself that she wants her husband to hold, constructs herself as the paragon of womanly, virtuous faithfulness.¹²¹ These moments in the *Odyssey*, coupled with other instances when Penelope displays her μῆτις ("cunning")—potentially at least in setting the contest of the bow, certainly when she sets out the final test of the bed by which she assures herself of Odysseus' identity—demonstrate clearly the "like-mindedness" of husband and wife, the ὁμοφροσύνη that, as Odysseus explains to Nausicaa, underpins a wonderful marriage.¹²²

The Ovidian Penelope, however, puts a different spin on the weaving of Laertes' shroud. She asserts quite clearly that her weaving deserves none of the glamor previously ascribed to it. She reconfigures her Homeric cunning. She emphasizes her role neither as mastermind of a plan to deceive the suitors nor as performer of a necessary task by means of her weaving and unraveling. Rather she insists that if Paris had drowned on his journey across the sea to capture Helen *nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem / lassaret viduas pendula tela manus* ("the hanging web would not tire out my widowed hands as I seek to deceive the endless night," 9-10). The only cunning the Ovidian Penelope can muster is an attempt to fool *herself*. Her nights are endless; she is tired and lonely. She tries to deceive (*fallere*) herself about the passage of time, to lull herself into believing the nighttime hours are passing faster than they actually are.¹²³ And she announces that she does not look upon her days with more favor. If the abduction of Helen had not occurred, she bewails, *nec quererer tardos ire relictas dies* ("I would not, abandoned, be continually complaining that the days pass slowly," 8).

Here again, an explanation based on generic codes does not seem to provide a full picture of what the Ovidian Penelope loses, from the perspective of the Homeric text, by giving up her deceit. Barchiesi considers Penelope's lack of duplicity in light of the transfer of her story from epic to elegy. As an elegiac motif, the activity of weaving marks Penelope as a paradigm of conjugal love and fidelity, not as a trickster. After all, Barchiesi continues, because Ulysses is no longer an epic hero but the erotic beloved, or addressee of an elegiac love letter, his characteristic wiliness does not come into play. As a consequence, Penelope does not need to attire herself in her customary cunning.¹²⁴ And yet, as we have seen, and shall continue to see, although the Ovidian Penelope recasts her Homeric self, she does not similarly strip Ulysses of his epic qualities. Penelope's dismissive posture toward her weaving of the shroud for Laertes not only diminishes the importance of her ruse by placing the focus on her wretchedness rather than on her μήτις, but further undermines her trick by deferring centrality for the act onto Ulysses. Ulysses remains away from home; it is because of his absence she finds the night *spatiosam* ("endless"), because of him that she considers

her hands *viduas* ("widowed").¹²⁵ In her construction of events, the trick of the shroud depends entirely on her husband.

As we have noted, the Homeric Penelope's cunning spreads beyond her weaving. Matching wits with Odysseus, she too plays a role in the complex dance between husband and wife to negotiate identity. Each has several cards to play in an effort to achieve the desired result: that she should acknowledge him as her long-absent husband and that he should certify her as his faithful wife. And the Homeric Penelope does indeed play her cards, obfuscating the issue of her fidelity and forcing Odysseus to prove his identity with the contest of the bow and, more significantly, with the test of the bed. The Ovidian Penelope undermines this aspect of her Homeric counterpart's power as well. Openly, and throughout the epistle, she stresses her identity as loyal wife of Ulysses, while steadfastly refusing to question his.

She begins her letter, and also her self-configuration, with the words: *Haec tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixē* ("Your Penelope sends this to you Ulysses, who are slow," 1). Although she is the nominative, the subject actively performing the task of sending the letter, she conspicuously defines herself in terms of her addressee. She intimates that she cannot imagine herself without him as a reference point for her own self definition: I am yours—*tua*. Toward the end of the epistle, Penelope reiterates this conception of self, locating herself firmly vis-à-vis her husband. Revealing the pressure that her father exerts upon her to choose a new husband and just about to launch into a description of her suitors, the Ovidian Penelope is in a perfect position to create for her husband some of the potential worry present in the Homeric text for Odysseus. Has she remained faithful? Will she wait? Will he get back to Ithaca in time? Instead, she exclaims: *tua sum, tua dicar oportet; / Penelope coniunx semper Ulixis ero* ("I am yours, it is proper that I be called yours; I shall always be Penelope, wife of Ulysses," 83–84).

The Ovidian Penelope has certainly discovered a striking image for her self-description. The heroine has chosen to adopt a formulaic way of speaking about herself: *Penelope coniunx Ulixis* ("Penelope, wife of Ulysses"). The formulation, moreover, is that of an epitaph, as if somehow her identity as his wife were unchanging, frozen for all time,¹²⁶ as if there could never be a question of her marrying anyone else. She continues to insist on her

identity as his: *tua sum, tua dicar oportet* ("I am yours; it is proper that I be called yours"). The Ovidian Penelope exhibits no corresponding need, so important in the Homeric text, that Ulysses reestablish his identity as her long-lost husband. She portrays herself as suspicious of no potential imposter who might arrive in Ulysses' place,¹²⁷ and further, as profoundly unwilling to wield the power she possesses by requiring from him some unimpeachable proof that he is, in fact, Ulysses. In her story she establishes Ulysses as the point of reference for her self-definition. She constructs herself in terms of her relationship to him. In her depiction he is a firm, central, anchoring point; in her eyes, quite contrary to events in the Homeric text, he certainly requires no such reciprocal characterization dependent on her.¹²⁸

After spending the greater portion of her letter discussing Ulysses, Penelope returns to herself and to the events in Ithaca to close out the epistle. She mentions the suitors, the large number of disloyal servants and retainers within the palace, and the few who remain loyal. She recalls the three members of his family to him, granting to each characteristics of helplessness: *tres sumus imbelles numero, sine viribus uxor / Laertesque senex Telemachusque puer* ("we are three in number, all weak—your wife, without strength, Laertes, an old man, and Telemachus, a boy," 97–98). Here again a quick glimpse at the *Odyssey* reveals that this is not quite a complete depiction of her last twenty years. Indeed, as Penelope reminds her eager suitors in Book 18, when Odysseus departed from Ithaca for Troy he left her in control of everything in his absence.¹²⁹ And apparently she managed affairs well; for Odysseus in his disguise as the beggar strikingly compares her in a "reverse simile" to a good king.¹³⁰ Moreover, the Ovidian Penelope carefully elides Telemachus' coming of age and his assumption of a more powerful role as evidenced in his recent escape out of Ithaca against the will of these suitors—*invitis omnibus* ("with everyone unwilling," 100)—to make journeys to Pylos and to Sparta. She insists that the *puer* ("boy") Telemachus needs his father (107–8), while old Laertes holds off his day of death until his dear son can be at hand to perform the filial duty of closing his father's eyes (113–14).

Bringing the letter to its conclusion with a final meditation on herself, she warns her husband: *certe ego, quae fueram te discedente puella, / protinus ut redeas, facta videbor anus* ("although you

should return home immediately, I, who was a young girl when you left, shall certainly seem to have become an old woman," 115–16). She chooses to envision herself as if through his eyes as she imagines them, through the eyes of a man who might tell his new girlfriend about his *rustica coniunx* ("provincial wife," 77) still waiting for him at home after so many years.¹³¹ While in the Homeric narrative Penelope "functions both as a subject weaving her own plot and as an object constituted by the gazes of various male characters,"¹³² the Ovidian Penelope closes out her own narrative by portraying herself solely as the object of the gaze of others. And yet, in telling contrast, she feels no concern whatsoever that in the passage of twenty years Ulysses might have turned into an old man. In fact, she beseeches him to hasten homeward as *portus et ara tuis* ("haven and altar to your own," 110).

As the Ovidian Penelope removes herself from the traditional telling where she enjoys a certain authority and power due to the ambiguity surrounding her thoughts and actions, and narrates her version of events according to the subjective perspective that epistolary fiction offers to its writer, she rejects the indeterminacy that surrounds her character in the *Odyssey* but strangely chooses instead, aided by the generic conventions of an epistle, to emphasize her own powerlessness in multiple ways. Sitting in the solitude of her room composing her letter, the heroine creates a picture of herself as a writer, all the while clearly pointing to the generic aspects of epistolarity that confine rather than empower her, namely the absence of her addressee and the lack of conversational exchange inherent in any epistle. Although her written attempts at communication remain unsuccessful, in stark contrast all the men around her employ a speech that its hearers drink in, understand, appreciate. Furthermore, she refuses to exploit to her own advantage a letter's tension between the power of the writer and that of the reader over the shape the narrative takes; rather, she uses her epistle to show the extent of Ulysses' influence on each word she writes. Penelope explicitly focuses her story on Ulysses, underscoring his significance while simultaneously minimizing her own. She refuses to follow the *Odyssey* and its revision of the heroic code to encompass the return home as part of a man's glory. Thus, she shuns her own importance in allowing for her husband's safe homecoming and insists that κλέος belongs only to wartime exploits

that necessitate a forgetfulness of home and family. Instead of dispelling the ambiguity surrounding her character in the *Odyssey* with a strong Penelope whose story may involve others, but others who move only in the spaces peripheral to her own central space in the text, she manages just the opposite. Positioning herself at the textual margins, she establishes long-absent Ulysses as the protagonist of *her* narrative.

BRISEIS TO ACHILLES: *HEROIDES* 3

Interpretations of *Heroides* 3, in general, focus either on intertextual issues and/or on generic ones. On the one hand, for example, Barchiesi's commentary on the poem contains good observations about how Briseis' letter constitutes in largest measure an Ovidian rewriting of the famous embassy to Achilles in Book 9 of the *Iliad*, although her words also echo other significant moments in the Homeric text. On the other hand, genre-based criticism points out the strong presence of elegiac conventions in Briseis' composition. Interpreters consider how various elegiac tropes, such as the *servitium amoris* ("the slavery of love") or the beloved placed in the role of family or conqueror, have been rendered quite literal in this poem. They argue that Ovid thereby underscores the genre's frequently deployed conventions¹³³ or marks out his witty, parodic travesty of the genre.¹³⁴ Both of these readings offer insights into the Ovidian text and therefore inform my own. But again, as with the previous poem, I seek to reconsider Briseis' epistle by shifting the focus. I am concerned primarily with how the poet makes use of an epistolary text to refashion the Homeric character, not for the sake of exploring the poet's cleverness but in order to examine his portrayal of the heroines in a text that purports to offer them status as central characters. As with Penelope, recent interpretations of the *Iliad*, especially feminist ones that focus on the women in the epic, provide a strong starting point from which to consider the Ovidian text. By carefully reviewing the heroine in the Homeric text the reader obtains a fuller picture of the possibilities the Ovidian heroine had to draw on in her epistolary self-presentation; the angles she highlights, obfuscates, or makes unambiguously clear, are telling.

Like the characterization of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, the portrayal of Briseis in the *Iliad*, on close examination, reveals ambiguity and doubleness. Briseis differs significantly from her

counterpart Penelope, however, both in her circumstances and in the extent to which she plays an actively important role in the Homeric text. The indeterminacy surrounding the words of Penelope does not find an echo in Briseis' language; the captive woman speaks only once. And yet, she motivates the central plot of the epic. Agamemnon, compelled to return his captive mistress Chryseis to relieve the army of the plague that has beset them on account of her abduction, decides as his compensation to deprive Achilles of his "war-prize" (γέρας). In his wrath Achilles withdraws and refuses to fight. Already Briseis' status appears double; an objectified γέρας,¹³⁵ nevertheless she propels the narrative.

In the power struggle between Agamemnon and Achilles she appears to exist solely as a symbol of τίμη ("honor"). Agamemnon loses one token of his warrior prowess and demands a replacement symbol; his honor as a fighter, but also as a leader, is at stake. To him Briseis becomes merely a substitute for Chryseis.¹³⁶ Deprived of his prize, the outward sign of his honor, Achilles is humiliated. And yet, when the embassy arrives to persuade Achilles to return to the battlefield, the hero expresses more complex feelings toward Briseis, calling her his "dear wife."¹³⁷ Even while the hero emphasizes his emotional attachment to Briseis—"thus I too felt for her (φίλεον) from my heart"¹³⁸—however, she does not entirely escape her configuration as signifier of his κλέος. He "is attached to her" (φιλέει), "although she is won by [his] spear."¹³⁹ And in the next line she receives again the appellation γέρας ("war prize").¹⁴⁰ When Achilles speaks of Briseis for the final time, once he and Agamemnon settle their dispute and Achilles agrees to receive her back, one cannot but question his previous declaration of affection. He wishes that Artemis had killed Briseis before she had had the chance to become the cause of a deadly quarrel between men.¹⁴¹ Again at this moment "Briseis is a *geras* only, a pawn in the men's disputes."¹⁴²

Briseis' single moment of self-characterization looms in stark contrast. In Book 19, upon her return to Achilles, in Briseis' only instance of direct speech, she laments the death of Patroclus. Markedly absent from her words is evidence of affection or passion for Achilles. In fact, she bestows all terms of endearment on Patroclus.¹⁴³ At the heart of her speech, in six of the thirteen hexameters, she relives the horrific slaughter she witnessed of her

brothers and her husband as well as the destruction of her father's city—all, as she indicates, at the hands of Achilles. These events define her; she considers herself a broken woman,¹⁴⁴ a captive for whom the best possible future scenario involves a marriage to Achilles rather than permanent status as his slave-woman. She laments that with Patroclus' death his promise to elevate her union with Achilles through marriage eludes her. This is the picture Briseis advances of herself.

The reader of *Heroides* 3 expects, therefore, to encounter the voice of an Ovidian Briseis who resembles the Homeric one, who, given the opportunity to tell her own story, will elaborate in the style and tenor of the Homeric character. After all, as Bar-chiesi astutely observes, *Heroides* 3 offers us the opportunity we never get in the *Iliad* to hear Briseis' response, rather than Achilles', to the decision of Agamemnon to take her as his own.¹⁴⁵ Strikingly, however, the Ovidian heroine distorts the words of her Homeric counterpart, and further, she undermines her own. From the very opening Briseis' letter is intriguingly self-effacing. Like Penelope in *Heroides* 1, Briseis contrives to undermine the authority of her epistolary narrative as she tells it. She too manipulates the generic rules of letter writing to her own detriment rather than to her advantage.

Like Penelope before her, Briseis opens the letter to Achilles with a clear reference to the fact that she is writing. Again recalling Penelope, this heroine too manages to sabotage her only means of communication; she points out that her epistolary composition will not be able to convey the necessary information correctly, forcefully, or successfully. In the first distichs of her epistle Briseis considers her own language and declares that it lacks the power to signify persuasively, even adequately:

quam legis, a rapta Briseide littera venit
 vix bene barbarica Graeca notata manu.
 quascumque adspicies, lacrimae fecere lituras;
 sed tamen et lacrimae pondera vocis habent.¹⁴⁶ (1-4)

[The writing that you read—Greek hardly well-written by a barbarian hand—comes from Briseis, who has been stolen away. And whichever stains you will see my tears have made. But nevertheless my tears have the force of speech.]

She highlights several shortcomings. Presenting her case in her own words, Briseis acknowledges, by the second line, that she cannot express herself in the most advantageous manner possible with a letter. Greek, after all, is not her native tongue. While critics point out the undeniable Ovidian humor in this configuration of a barbarian woman bemoaning her bad Greek in a Latin poem,¹⁴⁷ another more serious meaning comes across if we consider these words in terms of the portrayal of Briseis rather than in terms of Ovid's witty relationship with the reader. A glance at another Ovidian text offers a richer reading of this line in *Heroides* 3. In the *Ars Amatoria*, the *praeceptor amoris* ("the authority on love") suggests the importance of a good love letter for arousing passion in a man. He writes: *a, quotiens dubius scriptis exarsit amator / et nocuit formae barbara lingua bonae* ("how often has a hesitant lover been set afire by written words and how often has a barbarian tongue marred a beautiful appearance").¹⁴⁸ Drawing attention to her inability to communicate fluently Briseis therefore undermines her purpose in writing the letter; her lack of linguistic proficiency will actually hamper her attempts to win back her lover. Moreover, she claims that if her written words suffer from a lack of clarity and force then perhaps her tears and the traces they leave behind will better serve to express her feelings for Achilles.¹⁴⁹ And yet, although she hopes that they will have *pondera vocis* ("the force of speech"), her tears further erode her ability to communicate. Falling from her eyes as she writes, they leave stains on the page, erasing or blurring the words already deemed inadequate.

Not only does she pronounce herself incapable of successfully expressing herself in a letter, but Briseis also manipulates the conventions of her chosen genre to her disadvantage. By convention the writer can use her letter to create the illusion that writer and addressee are engaging in conversation. One technique for creating the desired illusion of dialogue in a letter is for the writer to insert the words of the addressee, often attributed to past conversations, to which she now responds.¹⁵⁰ Yet, as we noted earlier in our discussion of epistolarity, it is equally a property of the letter that, rather than bringing about the desired illusion of verbal exchange and presence, the writer's blatant attempts to fashion dialogue can serve instead to underscore the monologic structure of an epistle and the absence that makes it

necessary to write. Twice Briseis adds Achilles' words to her own, and both times she manages to emphasize the lack of exchange inherent in a letter. The first time she makes use of the technique of recalling her addressee's words she is seeking to move Achilles to relent from his anger and to accept her back from Agamemnon. She reminds him of an oath he swore upon the destruction of her city and family. She insists: *tu mihi iuratus per numina matris aquosae / utile dicebas ipse fuisse capi* ("you swore to me by the powers of your watery mother, and you used to say that it was beneficial for me to be captured," 53–54), inserting his words into the text so that she can argue with him that his oath does not ring true. Seemingly she struggles to fashion the appearance of conversation. And yet, by throwing his words back at him and then accusing him of speaking falsely she simulates the give and take of argument, and thus creates the expectation of a further response from him to her accusation. When it does not come, the silence is deafening.

Her second endeavor to create a dialogue similarly points out the lack of verbal exchange in an epistolary composition. This time Briseis resorts to fabricating hypothetical rather than actual conversation. Reproaching Achilles for seeking enjoyment with women and song during his time away from the battlefield, she insists that Agamemnon has not engaged in any sexual relations with her. You cannot make the same claims, she informs him, asking the question and inserting his answer within the movement of the distich: *si tibi nunc dicam 'Fortissime, tu quoque iura / nulla tibi sine me gaudia facta' — ne ges* ("if now I should say to you: 'Most courageous one, you also swear that no joys came about for you while you were without me,' you would refuse," 111–12). The reply she places in Achilles' mouth undercuts her attempts to fashion dialogue. The answer she attributes to him is (in effect) silence, as he refuses to swear falsely. His imagined silence draws attention to the "real" fact that as her epistolary addressee he is not present to participate in discussion, that only the writer has a voice in a letter.

When she turns to self-representation, the heroine continues to twist the generic possibilities of an epistle against herself. Like Penelope, Briseis also chooses not to exploit the generic tension inherent in a letter between the writer's power to compose her narrative and the force the addressee exerts over its final form.

Briseis too gives the impression that, first and foremost, the impact of her words on the absent hero dictates how and what she writes. Although according to the rules of the genre, the letter writer wields the power to construct herself and her addressee as she sees fit, the Ovidian Briseis, highlighting instead the constraints the addressee can place on the writer's narrative freedom, omits the one moment in the *Iliad* in which Briseis subjectively characterizes herself. On the contrary, replicating her appearance in the Homeric text as a woman who primarily takes shape through the heroes' eyes, Ovid's Briseis fashions herself alternately as interchangeable, as a γέρας ("war prize"),¹⁵¹ or as object of Achilles' "love."

From her first words she portrays herself so that she willingly embodies a definition that Achilles constructs for her in the *Iliad*. She reveals that she has adopted Achilles' view of her as a captive won by his fighting. She writes her letter in Greek in order to be understood but describes herself as *barbarica* (2), adopting a Greek conception of the world's division into Greek and not-Greek, or βάρβαρος, which is here nicely encapsulated in the juxtaposition of *barbarica* and *Graeca* (2). From the start, Briseis depicts herself as if she were making a self-assessment with the eyes of her Greek lover.

In the first line of the epistle she describes herself briefly with the modifier *rapta* ("stolen away"). One wonders whether she refers to her seizure from Achilles' tent by Agamemnon or whether she proposes *rapta* as her essential condition, taken first from her homeland by Achilles and now a second time by Agamemnon. In either case, she constructs herself as acted upon rather than as acting. The first two lines in which she speaks of Achilles (5–6) offer a sharp contrast. Twice in those lines she addresses him both as *dominus* ("master") and as *vir* ("my lover/husband"), titles that gain force in their collocation as well as in their repetition. That she considers her lover or *vir* also to be her *dominus* brings more clearly into focus her self-definition as *rapta*. Again she imagines herself in relation to him. She fashions herself rather strikingly as if through the eyes of the warriors in the *Iliad* who see her only as γέρας or signifier of κλέος. The Homeric Briseis never once refers to herself, despite her misfortunes, as a slave, or to Achilles as anything but "swift" or "godlike," his generic epithets.¹⁵²

Further engaging with, yet altering, the Homeric poem, the Ovidian Briseis grasps at the moment when Achilles describes Briseis as φίλη ("dear/beloved"). The hexameter of epic gives way to the elegiac couplet, and the heroine translates the epic hero into an elegiac lover.¹⁵³ This generic transposition has been fully documented,¹⁵⁴ and so I do no more than briefly summarize here. Briseis makes use of key elegiac terminology as she chides Achilles, reminding him of their "love" (*amor*, 12) and asking him once again to take on the "name of an eager lover" (*cupidi nomen amantis*, 26).¹⁵⁵ Within her new generic parameters, Briseis toys with a potential opportunity to assert her centrality in the story. In an effort to persuade him to yield in his anger and accept her back from Agamemnon she implores, *propter me mota est, propter me desinat ira / siquae ego tristitiae causa modusque tuae* ("your anger was set in motion on account of me; on account of me let it cease. Let me be the cause and the end of your sadness," 89–90).¹⁵⁶ In the shift from bellicose to amatory values, Achilles' anger arises not from a loss of honor but from the loss of his lover.

Let us consider, however, the change of genre from the perspective of the light it casts on the portrayal of the heroine. It seems that Briseis, much to her disadvantage, has read her elegy too well. Despite the potential power in discovering that she herself is the key to Achilles' entire story, the Ovidian Briseis focuses instead on yet another aspect of the elegiac genre: the fantasy of the beloved's fickleness in stark contrast to the lover-poet's eternal faithfulness. By creating herself as lover-poet in an elegiac landscape she opens up the possibility that Achilles, like the Propertian Cynthia and the Ovidian Corinna, enjoys a dalliance or two on the side. Toward the end of the letter, she fabricates an explanation for why Achilles would refuse the offer to receive her back. Her return to his tent would eliminate any further reason for him to shun the battlefield. Since he categorically refuses her restoration and therefore more fighting, she imagines that he has found himself another girlfriend¹⁵⁷ whose company he holds dearer than the possibility of performing warlike deeds (113–19).¹⁵⁸ She attributes only one possible reason to the hero for this unusual refusal: *pugna nocet, citharae noxque Venusque iuvant* ("the battle is harmful; the lyre, the night and Venus are pleasing," 116).¹⁵⁹ As a result, in a move that is counterintuitive to

elegy, Briseis implores Achilles to give up his life of *otium* ("leisure"), advocating instead that he take up a military one.¹⁶⁰ Once again, however, this is not simply a generic joke. Briseis undermines herself, and her significance, by urging Achilles back into his traditional epic mode in which she, as woman and war captive, must fade into the background.

Throughout the entire epistle, Briseis' thoughts constantly return to, and thus underscore, the disparity she constructs between Achilles and herself. He is *fortissimus* ("most courageous" 111) or *fortis Achilles* ("strong Achilles," 137), *ferreus* ("hard-hearted," 138), her *levamen* ("solace," 62); she considers herself *rapta* ("stolen away," 1), *infelix* ("ill-starred," 16), *misera* ("wretched," 61), *sollicita* ("anxious," 137). And yet, to arrive at such a pitiful and helpless self-portrait, Briseis leaves behind her prior notion of a central and significant self—*et fueram patriae pars ego magna meae* ("and I had been a great part of my homeland," 46). The Iliadic Briseis understands that her aristocratic past entitles her to the hope that she will become Achilles' wife. In glaring contrast, the Ovidian Briseis focuses on herself as a war prize. She too asserts that attaching herself to Achilles represents the best possible scenario for her future, but in order to do so she willingly casts aside the self-characterization of the Homeric Briseis. The Ovidian heroine simply foregoes claim to her earlier role as princess and wife, and creates for herself a new configuration as satellite to her master; she relishes, even cultivates, her servile attachment to him. She accepts his enemies as her foes. She prefers slavery to Achilles to a similar position in the entourage of Agamemnon; she does, after all, know that the army's commander compelled Achilles to hand her over, thus inciting the hero's far-famed wrath. As Agamemnon has become Achilles' foe, so she views her latest captor as her enemy. Further, she fears to escape the clutches of Agamemnon because, dividing her loyalties along the same lines as her lover's, she envisions Trojan enemies who might capture her and submit her to yet another version of the same slavery (15–20).¹⁶¹ Briseis imagines herself in various ways as subordinate to Achilles.

From her captivity inside the tent of Agamemnon, rumor reaches her that Achilles is threatening to sail homeward the very next morning. Distraught, she insists that she would prefer to die than to witness his departure without her (63–66). When

she describes the effect of potential abandonment with the phrase, *sanguinis atque animi pectus inane fuit* ("[her] heart was bereft of blood and life," 60), the reader cannot help but notice that the woman recalls the destruction of her city and the slaughter of her loved ones with less emotion (45–50). Here again her priorities clash with those of the woman in the Homeric text. The Ovidian Briseis pleads with Achilles that if he wants to go home, at least he should allow her on board his ship where she will not be a great *sarcina* ("baggage/burden," 68). Once more she manipulates a representation of herself stemming from the perspective of the Iliadic heroes. But this time she outdoes them in undermining her status. She is no longer even a prize (γέρας) as she was throughout the *Iliad*; in her self-portrait she turns herself into excess baggage (*sarcina*).¹⁶²

The Ovidian heroine also manipulates the unromantic and grimly realistic hope expressed by the Homeric Briseis that she become Achilles' lawful wife. The Ovidian Briseis alters this sentiment until it becomes a servile desire to remain with him at any cost. Once he returns to Greece, she realizes, he will no longer share his couch principally with her since he will choose a wife (71–74). And yet, she still insists on accompanying him home in the only capacity open to her—she will become a household slave. Imagining a detailed scene in which she encounters Achilles' wife, Briseis pictures herself as *humilis* and *famula* ("humble," and "a slave," 75), in his home, working wool. Even when she dreams of a possible future she declares *victorem captiva sequar, non nupta maritum* ("I shall follow the victor as a captive, not a husband as a bride," 69), stressing the disparity between them as well as her marginality by placing the descriptives side by side. If he is a victor, then she follows him as a captive; were he the husband, she would be the wife.

Moreover, Briseis pointedly denies herself the role of wife, relentlessly reaffirming her own status as slave.¹⁶³ She recalls for the hero an episode during which a fellow slave mistakenly calls her *domina* ("mistress"). Briseis informs him that she refused to accept the title, instead explaining to the woman that she looks upon her own condition as *servitium* ("servitude," 101–02).¹⁶⁴ She reveals this vignette to Achilles as proof of the sincerity of her statement: *nec me pro coniuge gessi / saepius in domini serva vocata torum* ("nor have I, a slave called quite often into the bed of her

master, behaved as a wife," 99-100). The collocation of *domini* and *serva* strongly emphasizes the way Briseis characterizes both herself and her addressee. With a similar result she conjures up a domestic scene for Achilles in which his lovely young bride attempts to disfigure Briseis by cutting off her hair in jealousy while the household slave, Briseis, sits by, servilely carding wool.¹⁶⁵ Briseis begs Achilles to intercede on her behalf (77-80) with the words: *haec quoque nostra fuit* ("this woman also was once mine," 80). In her own self-representation, on the one hand, she highlights the central importance of her attachment to Achilles. On the other hand, Briseis fashions herself as utterly dispensable to him (*fuit*).

Even before the Ovidian Briseis directly compares herself to Achilles' imaginary future bride, she has already, much to her own detriment, connected herself with one of the *Iliad's* most significant wives, Andromache. In the middle of the epistle Briseis calls to the reader's mind an association the heroine perceives between herself and Andromache as characterized in the sixth book of the *Iliad*. On the one hand, the allusion serves to underscore once again the Ovidian Briseis' lack of conjugal status. Unlike Briseis, Andromache is a wife. On the other, the Ovidian Briseis manipulates a connection that already exists in Briseis' one passage of direct speech in the Homeric original in order to distance herself further from Andromache.¹⁶⁶ In the *Iliad*, the link between Briseis and Andromache serves to indicate "the universality of Briseis' fate as woman's fate in the *Iliad*."¹⁶⁷ Ovid has read his Homer carefully. Ovid's text, however, dispenses with the subtlety displayed in the *Iliad*. The Ovidian heroine screams out the parallel she sees between herself and Andromache. Echoing Andromache's famous utterance,¹⁶⁸ the Ovidian Briseis apostrophizes Achilles thus: *tu dominus, tu vir, tu mihi frater eras* ("you were my master, my man, my brother," 52). By the letter's conclusion *frater* ("brother") and *vir* ("man") have fallen away and only *dominus* ("master") remains.¹⁶⁹ Master, "lover," brother, Achilles fulfills all the roles of male authority in her life.

Let us consider how this allusion serves to characterize Briseis. The Ovidian heroine turns a wrenching lament on the loss of family that women suffer in war into one more way she can render herself pitiful and helpless before Achilles. In fact, Briseis makes a most glaring omission in her usurpation of these lines.

Andromache includes "revered mother" (πότνια μήτηρ) as one of roles that Hector fulfills for her.¹⁷⁰ Briseis removes from her catalogue the one female figure, replacing it instead with the figure of the *dominus*, who does not himself appear in Andromache's list. In the end Briseis emphasizes not the similarities between herself and Andromache but rather the differences. And indeed, it is her conception of Achilles as *dominus* that rings most strikingly in the ears of the reader from the double opening reference to him as *dominusque virque* (5 and 6), to the closing line in which she pleads with him to order her to return to him *domini iure* ("in accordance with the right of a master," 154) no matter what he will do thereafter.

Throughout the epistle Briseis stresses the ease with which Achilles can leave her behind, for a new mistress (115–20), for a new wife (71ff), for a homecoming (61). If he should depart for Phthia and abandon her, she decides, she is willing and resolved to die (143–44). His actions would compel her to end her life. Indeed, Achilles himself should draw his sword and drive it through her body. Picking up once again on yet another way Achilles speaks of her in the *Iliad*, she demands: *cur autem iubeas? stricto pete corpora ferro* ("Why, however, should you issue orders? Attack my body with your drawn sword," 145). As he decides to reenter the fray after Patroclus' death, Achilles announces that he wishes Artemis had killed Briseis, thus preventing the woman from causing strife among men and the deaths of countless Achaian warriors.¹⁷¹ The Ovidian Briseis manipulates his vision of her in Book 19 one final time to her detriment. She insists that she desires death at Achilles' own hands, passive victim to his active role as killer, not so that he can move on to achieve warlike κλέος but rather so that he can beat a hasty retreat home.

A consideration of epistolary conventions reveals that Briseis, like Penelope, in fact like all the heroines of the *Heroides*, angles for a marginal position in her own story. She turns her chosen medium against herself, drawing attention from the first to the inevitability of her failure to persuade Achilles with a letter because she is not a native speaker of his language. Empowered by the rules of the genre in which she writes to create and to cast herself in a role central to her story, perhaps even to free herself from the roles other characters envision for her in the *Iliad*, the Ovidian Briseis instead distorts her various appearances in the

Homeric text to her own detriment. Simultaneously she casts her addressee as the powerful figure in her epistolary narrative. Thus, she highlights not the letter writer's power to shape her own story but rather the constraints the addressee places on the writer, revealing that she remains guided in what she writes primarily by the effect she imagines her words will have on Achilles. She portrays herself as a helpless and secondary figure, *rapta, serva* ("captured and a slave") and shifts Achilles into the central role, an absent character in this version—even nonexistent within the textual world of *Heroides* 3—nevertheless marked by the attributes of power and plenitude: *dominus, fortis Achilles* ("master, strong Achilles"). One line, toward the end of the letter, perhaps best sums up all of *Heroides* 3. Briseis announces that she can imagine for herself no other definition than one in which she considers *nostram, tua munera, vitam* ("my life, your gift," 149). She does not even call her life her own without splitting the noun from its adjective to interpose that, in truth, her life belongs not to her but to him.

DEIANIRA TO HERCULES: *HEROIDES* 9

The epistle from Deianira to Hercules, written at the moment when Deianira, in Trachis, receives the captive Iole, sent on ahead by Hercules himself, has suffered attacks on its authenticity.¹⁷² The most serious challenges to Ovidian authorship arise from problems scholars perceive in the poem's structure and style.¹⁷³ In *Heroides* 9, uniquely in the Ovidian collection, news reaches the writer from the external world during the act of writing and this additional information causes a shift in her composition. Deianira's epistle comes to a close with a haunting refrain, also unparalleled in the *Heroides*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, scholars question the amount of time and attention Deianira devotes to discussing the story of Hercules and Omphale as well as to recounting, not once but twice, Hercules' famous labors. Surely Ovid could not have the poor poetic judgment, the argument runs, to ask the reader to believe that the heroine, looking upon her husband's new lover, would linger over the story of Hercules' debasing enslavement to yet another woman,¹⁷⁴ or that she would recount her husband's glorious feats.

I suggest, however, that each of the features that have given scholars reason to question Ovidian authorship actually reinforces the opposite conclusion. The messenger's news, which alters the action in the letter, is consistent with Ovid's intertextual program in the *Heroides*.¹⁷⁵ In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, "source text" for *Heroides* 9, the sudden news of Hercules' poisoning performs a pivotal role in the play, altering the course of the action, and Ovid reproduces this aspect of the Sophoclean tragedy within his composition. As to the refrain, the emphasis on Omphale and the double recitation of Hercules' deeds, these aspects also bring *Heroides* 9 in line with the other epistles in Ovid's collection. Each of these three "problems" in fact serves to characterize Deianira in a manner that by now is familiar to us. When her openly philandering husband sends home a beautiful captured princess, how can a young wife possibly respond with a story of a previous lover and with an insistence on his glorious labors? The answer involves Deianira's representation of herself as well as of her absent hero-husband. She too, like Briseis and Penelope, when faced with the prospect of telling her own story from her own perspective, turns Hercules into the central protagonist of her narrative, the hero around whom the tale revolves and the other characters take shape. Deianira too manipulates the generic tenets of epistolarity to her own detriment.

Sophocles' *Trachiniae* provides *Heroides* 9 with a powerful precursor for the tale of Deianira and Heracles,¹⁷⁶ and again I want to examine the Ovidian heroine in conjunction with feminist readings of her counterpart in the "source text." The Sophoclean tragedy unfolds as a diptych, the first half focusing on Deianira, the second on Heracles. Hers is the story of a beautiful young princess for whose hand in marriage Heracles defeats a rival suitor. Transporting his bride home, Heracles entrusts her to the centaur Nessos for conveyance across a river. Nessos attempts to rape her, and the hero slaughters the beast to preserve Deianira's chastity.¹⁷⁷ Later, established as his wife in his palace, raising their son, she experiences a loneliness similar to that of Penelope—but no suitors arrive to court her. Her husband remains constantly absent from home, performing labors and other heroic (and not so heroic) deeds. Indeed, Ovid's Deianira picks up on this theme when she laments that *vir mihi semper abest et coniuge notior hospes*

("my husband is always absent and is more known to me as a guest than as a spouse," 33).

The arrival of Iole, a captive concubine, sent by Heracles to his wife, motivates the action for the first half of the Sophoclean tragedy. In response, Deianira sends Heracles a robe smeared with what she believes is a love-potion that will rekindle his passion for her. In fact she unwittingly smears the robe with a deadly poison. As soon as she learns of the destruction she has brought upon her husband, she chooses suicide and her half of the play comes to an end. The action of the tragedy builds up to Heracles' section of the diptych; indeed, despite his physical absence from the first half of the play, nevertheless it remains clear that he "has controlled both his own movements and those of others, in particular of Deianeira and Iole."¹⁷⁸ Slowly consumed by the deadly poison, Heracles demands revenge. Unwilling that his father should accuse his mother of murder, Hyllus reveals that Nessos had told Deianira his blood would work for her as a love potion to curb the philandering habits of her husband. Suddenly Heracles sees and understands the workings of Fate. He remembers the oracular pronouncement that no living creature would be responsible for his death; the long-dead Nessos killed him. As to Deianira, he does not think about her, or mention her again,¹⁷⁹ an omission that is striking especially in comparison to his all-consuming importance to her.

Moreover, Deianira herself appears to be complicit in characterizing herself as unremarkable and unworthy of attention. One intriguing feminist reading of the tragic heroine observes that Deianira constructs an extraordinary passivity for herself by manipulating two striking metaphors. Early in the play, Deianira designates herself as an outlying field that the farmer visits only twice a year, at sowing and at reaping time. Of this portrayal Page duBois writes: "it is significant that Sophocles represents Deianeira in this way, since usually this language is used by men of women's bodies and of the act of legal, marital, procreative intercourse . . . Deianeira is a fascinating character, a wife who internalizes her location in Greek culture, who accepts her place as the static field to which Herakles intermittently returns. . . ." ¹⁸⁰

A second image of the self as instrument, this time a writing tablet or *deltos*, also draws duBois' interest. Discussing the

instructions the dying Nessos passed on to her about administering the philter to Heracles, Deianira asserts: "I put aside none of the instructions, but I saved them like an inscription, hard to wash out from a bronze writing tablet."¹⁸¹ As the first metaphor suggests her passivity, so too, perhaps to an even greater extent, argues duBois, does the metaphor of woman as writing tablet. Deianira becomes "simply the passive medium for the transfer of the deadly *pharmakon* [drug]. . . . She is, metaphorically, simply the tablet on which the words of Heracles' fate, his agonizing death, are written by the enemy Centaur . . . Deianeira preserves the mark of the Centaur on her; she becomes herself the surface for the Centaur's writing."¹⁸² She is the surface by which one "man," Nessos, communicates with another, Heracles; Heracles deciphers the marks of Nessos.¹⁸³ The Ovidian heroine makes her own the Sophoclean Deianira's manifestation as "writing tablet." When she who is written receives the opportunity to write for herself—as the rules of the epistolary genre demand—the Ovidian Deianira does not re-imagine her character. Indeed, it seems extraordinarily fitting that she seizes upon this vivid Sophoclean metaphor. For what are Ovid's heroines, the vigilant reader notes, if not male-authored texts (writing tablets) that other men will read?

Strikingly Deianira, in *Heroides* 9, embraces the passivity and the marginality that fall to her lot in the Sophoclean drama rather than casting them aside and redefining herself. She fashions her epistle as if she were seeking to underscore the helpless and dependent nature of her character in Sophocles' drama. To this end she also imitates the construction of the tragedy, more precisely its focus on Hercules even in his absence from the stage.¹⁸⁴ Self-consciously drawing attention to the literary genre she is employing by opening and closing her composition with the emphatically epistolary words *gratulor* ("I render thanks") at the beginning and *vale* ("farewell") at the end,¹⁸⁵ she chooses not to emphasize the letter's capacity to empower and showcase its writer. More than any other heroine in the collection of epistles, Deianira portrays herself as drawing her identity from the absent hero, specifically from the fact that she is the wife of Hercules. In her description, he acquires the status of powerful hero who has accomplished great deeds, whereas she depicts herself as marginal to him, gaining standing and importance through his glorious

achievements. Once again the heroine writes as if considerations of her addressee, rather than thoughts of herself, dictate each and every word she puts down on paper. Again the heroine seeks to highlight the epistolary convention in which the reader—rather than the writer—exerts the most powerful influence over the writer's narrative.

The epistle's opening sentence focuses the reader's attention on Deianira's self-representation: *gratulor Oechaliam titulis accedere nostris*¹⁸⁶ ("I render thanks that Oechalia is added to our glories," 1). Hercules has sacked the city of Oechalia, a glorious deed; as wife of this great hero, some of the glory reflects on her and she shares in his accomplishments—*titulis nostris*.¹⁸⁷ Although some prefer to read *titulis vestris* ("your glories") finding it strange that Deianira should try to claim any credit for her husband's actions,¹⁸⁸ the use of *nostris* ("our [glories]") and her decision to pair herself with Hercules for better or for worse, which, as we shall see, pervades the entire epistle, in fact serves the opposite purpose to unwarranted self-aggrandizement. While this opening gambit yields the possibility that Deianira will identify herself with Hercules and thus partially usurp his greatness, almost immediately Deianira undercuts even this slight appropriation of his glory.

Because of the insistently (and much repeated) marginal position she carves out for herself vis-à-vis her husband, for her there can be no *honor* ("distinction," 31):

at bene nupta feror, quia nominer Herculis uxor,
sitque socer rapidis qui tonat altus equis.
quam male inaequales veniunt ad aratra iuveni,
tam premitur magno coniuge nupta minor.
non honor est sed onus species laesura ferentes:
siqua voles apte nubere, nube pari (27–32)

[But I am said to be well married because I am called the wife of Hercules, and the one who thunders on high with rapid horses is my father-in-law. As unequal bulls come to the plow with poor results, so a lesser wife is oppressed by a great husband. There is no honor, but an appearance [of honor] that will harm the ones bearing the burden. If you wish to marry well, marry an equal.]

Here she offers the reader a glimpse into how she chooses to define herself. The concluding line 32 indicates clearly that she does

not consider her marriage one of equals, and the remaining lines leave no doubt as to the significance of each player in the power imbalance she envisions. Each of the verbs she uses to describe herself is passive—*feror*, *nominer*, *premitur* ("I am said; I am called; [the bride] is oppressed"). *Nominer* jars especially; she construes the notion of her marriage and her title as *Herculis uxor* ("wife of Hercules") as something she is "called" rather than simply something she "is." The choice of language reminiscent of funerary epitaphs, *Herculis uxor*, in conjunction with the passive verb, creates her as if in a frozen or static social role attributed to her by those who name her (like those who read the tombstone).¹⁸⁹

As she moves beyond the two-word appellation (*Herculis uxor*) to a fuller description of her position as wife, her constructions become even more passive. Line 30 nicely sums up her self-representation. *Magnus* ("great") describes Hercules while the line works up to the adjective she ascribes to herself, *minor* ("lesser"), withheld for greater effect until the very last word of the pentameter. She, the *nupta minor* ("lesser bride"), finds herself at the end of the pentameter overshadowed, perhaps oppressed, as the passive verb *premitur* suggests, by the agent, *magno coniuge* ("by a great husband"). Even when she places him in the oblique case, while construing herself in the nominative, she attributes primacy to the absent hero by his syntactical positioning in the line.

The central image that Deianira deploys in this passage returns here for the second time. In the letter's opening distich she registers her consternation that *victorem victae succubuisse* ("the victor has submitted to the yoke in the hands of the vanquished woman," 2), employing *succumbo* in the sense reserved for animals yielding to the yoke.¹⁹⁰ She reinforces this view four lines later, asserting now unambiguously that *huic Iolen imposuisse iugum* ("Iole has placed the yoke on him," 6). She portrays the great hero as a domesticated animal whose power is harnessed and manipulated by a dominant woman. This backdrop, then, renders even more striking the contrasting way Deianira makes use of the metaphor a second time with reference to her own relationship to Hercules. Again the hero appears as a bull, but this time the woman with whom he is linked becomes an animal as well. Deianira does not choose to depict herself, like Iole, as a dominant plowman; instead she configures herself as the weaker beast of burden in a team of two.

Throughout the epistle, and not merely in contrast to herself, Deianira lingers on her husband's heroic nature. Indeed *Heroides* 9 offers what seems to be a constant retelling of *Hercules'* stories. Deianira creates Hercules as a heroic figure of great stature, describing him as the one *quem numquam Iuno seriesque immensa laborum / fregerit* ("whom Juno and an endless series of labors never destroyed," 5-6) and reminding him that Jove required more than one night *ut tantus conciperere* ("in order that you, so great, be conceived," 10). His toils and exploits, in her description, have an impact on the entire world—*vindicibus pacatum viribus orbem* ("the whole world is at peace by your avenging strengths," 13). Dry land and expanses of water everywhere owe their safety and security to her husband (15-16). Indeed, one day he will shed his mortality and join the gods in the sky whose weight he once supported—*quod te laturum est, caelum prius ipse tulisti* ("you yourself first bore the sky that will bear you," 17). She conjures up before the reader's eyes the youthful Hercules' slaughter of the snakes that entered his cradle (21-22) as well as his later victories over the Nemean lion, the three-headed Cerberus, the boar of Erymanthus (37-38), the Lernean hydra, Geryon, and the centaurs (85-100). Although the Ovidian Deianira, as a letter writer, has control of the narrative, her story focuses on her addressee, upon whose extraordinarily heroic stature she insistently dwells.

Against the backdrop of this larger-than-life portrait, she carefully foregrounds two of his numerous adulterous relationships: Hercules' current dalliance with Iole and his past slavish relationship to Omphale.¹⁹¹ These sections of *Heroides* 9 have induced critics to raise questions about Ovidian authorship. Surely an inferior poet, and not Ovid, must have composed these lines; Deianira lingers too long and too repetitiously over Hercules' stupendous feats as well as over his adulterous attachments.¹⁹² On the contrary, I propose that it is precisely in Deianira's recitations of her husband's affairs with Omphale and Iole that one discovers indicators of the poem's similarities to, and not differences from, the other single letters in the collection.¹⁹³ The repetitious retellings of Hercules' labors, even at moments the reader might find strange, indicate the strength of Deianira's narrative commitment to her husband. Even more strikingly than in Penelope's or Briseis' letters, in *Heroides* 9 the addressee, not the writer, is Deianira's central character.¹⁹⁴ She classifies her

feelings as secondary in importance, and shaping her narrative according to what she believes her addressee wants to hear, she maintains instead her rather dogged focus on Hercules and his relationship to his heroic status. In addition, her insistence on Hercules' adultery reveals yet another way in which Deianira, like Penelope and Briseis before her, highlights the centrality of the hero.¹⁹⁵

Considering the very moment at which her husband sends home his new lover, Deianira lingers quite strikingly on Hercules' reputation; now he appears as a weak lover, powerless before his mistress.¹⁹⁶ Certainly Deianira does not suppress all personal reaction to her husband's latest act of adultery. In composing her letter, she draws attention to a certain amount of pain, shame and insecurity. Tellingly speaking of Iole as *advena paelex* ("a foreign concubine," 121), she unhappily considers the possibility that Iole *nomine deposito paelicis uxor erit* ("will be a wife, with the appellation 'concubine' set aside," 132). She even reproaches her husband with a brief reference to the pain that his behavior inflicts upon her: *non sinis averti: mediam captiva per urbem / invitis oculis aspicienda venit* ("you do not allow me to turn myself away. The captive woman, upon whom my unwilling eyes must gaze, goes through the middle of the city," 123–24). And yet, these words only allude somewhat indirectly to her own feelings, focusing instead on Iole's entrance into Trachis. While not entirely suppressing her own reactions, she refers to them in ways that relegate them to a secondary position. As she receives the opportunity to tell her story from her point of view, in a twist rather disconcerting for the reader, Deianira concentrates on two moments of open, public adultery. In the heroine's hand these two relationships become vehicles through which she manifests her concern for the glory and heroic status of her husband.

In the case of Iole, Deianira intimates that the greatest reason for her distress is not her own pain; she is upset because Iole, Hercules' war-prize, does not show the proper humility. The captive does not resemble the vanquished slave *incultis captarum more capillis* ("with hair uncombed in the manner of slave women," 125) but instead *dat vultum populo sublimis ut Hercule victo* ("she loftily gazes on the people as if Hercules were conquered," 129). Deianira's remarks to her husband about the impropriety of

Iole's haughty behavior in defeat and his own debased position in the relationship mark a startling departure from the Sophoclean text. In the *Trachiniae* Deianira exhibits her capacity for extraordinary compassion. She understands that Heracles will in all likelihood choose the young Iole over the aging Deianira as his sexual partner.¹⁹⁷ And yet, nevertheless, Deianira expresses pity for the woman whose beauty led to the destruction of her homeland and to her own enslavement.¹⁹⁸ The blame rests on Heracles' shoulders, although she cannot muster much anger against him; she expresses mostly resignation.¹⁹⁹ That the Ovidian heroine here alters the Sophoclean heroine's reaction underscores just how much the potential damage to her husband's reputation motivates the Ovidian Deianira's concern.²⁰⁰ By vilifying Iole rather than displaying pity for her, Deianira positions the captive in an active role as possible destroyer of Hercules' heroic glory. By emphasizing his passivity in the erotic relationship, she hopes to prompt him to modify his behavior. Her strategy lies in juxtaposing his larger-than-life masculinity with his current state.

When Deianira focuses on Hercules' servile posture in his new relationship with Iole, she does so only in conjunction with a recitation of his labors. She will adopt a similar strategy, as we shall see, when she recalls Hercules' relationship to Omphale. Although Deianira's approach has seemed counterintuitive to some, in fact it brings her in line with the other heroines in the *Heroides*. Once again in her own narrative a woman chooses to yield center stage. Deianira insists on Hercules as protagonist of her story; she seems prepared to go to great lengths in order to maintain him in his central position. When she reproaches Hercules for his erotic submission to Iole, she carefully couples each mention of his current shame with a reference to his former glory, revealing that her ultimate goal is not to decry her husband's weakness but to remind him of his former greatness. When she asks him: *quid nisi notitia est misero quaesita pudori, / si cumulas turpi facta priora nota?* ("what other than notoriety was gained for your wretched shame if you crown your prior deeds with a dishonorable mark?" 19–20), she makes clear that what is at stake is his distinguished reputation. She informs him of the current rumor that Iole "brought under the yoke" (*imposuisse iugum*, 6) the hero whom an "endless series of labors" (*series immensa laborum*, 5)

could not subdue, further increasing the status of his labors with the hyperbolic *immensa*, "too many to count."²⁰¹ Evoking a rather humiliating image, Deianira ascribes the characteristic pose of military conqueror to love or Venus, and by extension to Iole—*haec humili sub pede colla tenet* ("this woman holds down your neck under her enslaved foot," 12).²⁰² And yet, even when he deposits his new lover on her doorstep, Deianira attempts to mitigate his humiliation; she juxtaposes yet another reference to his heroic past. *Quem non mille ferae, quem non Stheneleius hostis, / non potuit Iuno vincere, vincit Amor* ("love conquers the one whom a thousand wild animals, the Stheneleian enemy and Juno were not able to conquer," 25–26). She holds firmly to the belief that if she reminds him of his illustrious career, he will go back to his former glorious ways. Her constant recitation of his feats represents the way in which she attempts to coax him into assuming once again the role she wants to imagine for him, the role of heroic character in a story to whom all other figures remain secondary and marginal.

In a similar fashion, when Deianira dwells upon her husband's servitude to Omphale, and especially upon how Hercules deigned to dress himself up as a woman, she does so only by considering it in conjunction with his renown for his prior, far-famed exploits. The focus remains on how he placed his heroic status in a precarious position. Hercules used his hand, "victorious in a thousand labors" (*victricem mille laborum*, 75), to carry baskets and card wool among women. Deianira exclaims with consternation that she heard he wore necklaces (57), a headband (63), and a girdle (66). Each accusation of effeminacy, and cross-gendered clothing or behavior, however, comes in conjunction with a reminder of a former distinguished deed that cushions the blow—what would the lion, the boar, Antaeus, or Diomedes feel to know that the valiant hero who once defeated them was now engaging in transvestite activities (61ff)? As he positioned himself at his mistress' feet (82ff), Deianira conjectures, he told the stories of his tremendous achievements—stories that she herself now recalls for him (85–100).

While the Sophoclean tragedy, and more importantly its heroine, make little of Heracles' servitude to Omphale, granting it only brief mention,²⁰³ the reason the Ovidian Deianira chooses to dwell on this past adultery and debasement of Hercules becomes

clear when one considers the similarities she constructs between his relationship with Omphale and his current relationship to Iole.²⁰⁴ As Iole, the war captive, paradoxically appeared the victor over Hercules, Deianira also draws out his relationship with Omphale in terms of spoils, trophies, victors, and vanquished. While Hercules adorned himself in womanly attire, Omphale dressed herself up in all of his accoutrements, parading around with his club as well as his poisonous arrows (115–18). Deianira describes Omphale's donning the pelt of the Nemean lion, *e capto nota tropaea viro* ("famous spoils from a captive man," 104), as a symbolic conquering of Hercules, just as his donning of the hide symbolized his defeat of the beast—*non sunt spolia illa leonis, / sed tua, tuque feri victor es, illa tui* ("those are not the spoils of the lion, but of you. And you are the victor over the beast, but she, over you," 113–14).

Deianira considers her husband's relationship with Iole a redoubling of the pattern he established with the Lydian queen. Both women refuse to treat Hercules in the manner due a powerful hero. But Deianira possesses concrete knowledge from past experience that Hercules put an end to his slavish behavior in Lydia and returned to his old, heroic self. By establishing these two women as similar and active usurpers of his power, Deianira struggles to compel Hercules to alter his behavior and put down these threats to his heroic glory. It is for this reason primarily, then, that Deianira returns again and again to his heroic exploits in the midst of his two degrading adulterous relationships. In juxtaposing his glorious deeds with his shameful behavior, she provides him with the reminders of his greatness in order that he might reject his current humiliation in favor of his former heroism. Deianira adduces the example of the relationship with Omphale, from which he did disentangle himself, in conjunction with reminiscences of his multiple heroic labors in order to rally him from his present disgrace. She feels concern for *his* glory, for *his* heroism, identifying herself as wife of a great hero. Obsessed with creating him as central, powerful figure to whom she remains marginally attached, Deianira focuses on her husband's adultery not so that she can express her anger and distress but rather so that she can remind him of his heroic nature.

In the final portion of her letter she turns her attention to herself. The stories of Achelous and Nessos collapse into two

distichs. In her terse retellings she ignores the desire that she inspired in them and chooses to highlight the aspects of the tale that involve their ultimate defeats, or, in other words, Hercules' role in these two narratives. Moreover, she elides almost completely the action for which the reader most expects a detailed explanation: her own attempt to regain the love of her husband by sending him a robe doused in what she believes is a love potion. For indeed, the intertextual reader knows that since Iole has just arrived in Trachis, Deianira has just sent the poisoned robe to Heracles. Receiving the news from a messenger that Hercules is dying,²⁰⁵ she asks only two rhetorical questions—*ei mihi! quid feci? quo me furor egit amantem?* ("Alas! What have I done? To what point did my frenzy drive me, in love?" 145)—provoking immense frustration in the reader who certainly expects answers rather than questions. Indeed, epistolary narrative offers her a chance and a space to explain from her own subjective perspective her actions and to provide her reactions to the news of Hercules' impending death. Here no Hyllus appears driving her to silence with a scathing condemnation of what he interprets as her murderous behavior.²⁰⁶ Further, "the evidence certainly points to the existence of a very different kind of Deianira from Sophocles' heroine, indeed, a warrior-like, Amazonian figure, not to mention the almost Medea-like character of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the *Hercules Oetaeus*."²⁰⁷ Now, at long last, she can assert herself. And yet, she demurs, and offers instead a brief three lines explaining that Nessos as he died promised her that *vires sanguis amoris habet* ("blood has the strength of love," 162). Just as in Sophocles' version Deianira is the *deltos* ("writing tablet") the passive medium inscribed by Nessos with the fate of Heracles, so, in her own writing, she renders herself invisible in a strikingly similar fashion.

Deianira, however, does assume responsibility and does carve out an active role for herself when she decides to commit suicide. But suicide remains a questionable act, according to Nicole Loraux who, in her study of Greek tragedy, writes: "Finding a way out in suicide was a tragic solution, one that was morally disapproved in the normal run of everyday life. But, most important, it was a woman's solution and not, as has sometimes been claimed, a heroic act."²⁰⁸ And if, as Loraux contends, "the death of a man inevitably calls for the suicide of a woman, his wife,"²⁰⁹ then it

becomes apparent that Hercules motivates Deianira's choice to die; again she refuses herself full control. In part, he is dying and she cannot imagine herself without him (147–48).²¹⁰ In part, she suggests that the greatness and centrality of her husband demand certain behaviors from other people in accordance with their marginal attachments to him. Stating *ecquid adhuc habeo facti, cur Herculis uxor / credar? coniugii mors mea pignus erit* ("Have I done anything up until now on account of which I should be believed to be the wife of Hercules? My death will be a pledge of my marriage," 149–50), and emphasizing her self-conception as marginal with the passive *credar* ("I should be believed"), Deianira desperately seeks the definition as *Herculis uxor* ("wife of Hercules") for herself. In order to preserve the title, she is willing to die.²¹¹

A haunting refrain drives her toward her suicide, and, because this poetic technique appears only here in the *Heroides*, some scholars have considered the poem of non-Ovidian authorship.²¹² On the contrary, however, this refrain is, on the one hand, quite germane to this particular letter. Reminiscent as the refrain is of tragedy and ritual funeral lament, it seems the perfect formula with which a tragic heroine on the verge of suicide should conclude.²¹³ On the other hand, the refrain is in keeping with how Deianira chooses to construct herself throughout the epistle, and thus, by extension, as we have seen, with the manner that characterizes the Ovidian heroine in the *Heroides* as a collection. The refrain provides an instance in which she defines herself as active, refers to herself simply as Deianira. For once she fails to mention what she is called, or what she is believed to be. And yet, the repetition of *impia quid dubitas Deianira mori* ("impious Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?" 146, 152, 158, 164) encourages closer inspection. The reader questions whether *impia* is actually how Deianira views herself or whether perhaps it betrays that she chooses to consider herself through the eyes of Hercules.²¹⁴ Moreover, if Deianira keeps repeating the refrain, as one interpreter suggests, because the literal meaning of her name—etymologically man or husband destroyer—has finally become clear to her,²¹⁵ then the heroine presents herself at the moment of her death again with reference to Hercules. Through the insistent repetition of her own name, she portrays herself at the end of her life vis-à-vis her husband, as his killer.

When Howard Jacobson writes about the heroine of *Heroides* 9 that "Ovid's Deianira is a character-type rather familiar to us, though unusual in the ancient literary world. She is the ordinary, everyday woman who is married to the great man and lives through and in her husband's greatness,"²¹⁶ he gives the reader pause. The epistolary form does not offer an objective characterization but rather a highly subjective one. Why, the reader wonders, would this heroine depict herself as "ordinary" or "everyday"? Why, at the moment of receiving into her home her husband's latest young lover, does she concentrate on creating her husband as "the great man" in all his glory? And why does she conceive of herself as existing primarily "through and in her husband's greatness"? In a more exaggerated fashion than any other of the heroines in this collection, Deianira prefers to hold out to her addressee a narrative he wants to hear, to imagine her own story with Hercules as its heroic protagonist.

Conclusions

When Ovid's heroines write their stories as letters, the conventions of epistolary discourse as well as the recurrent themes and tropes in epistolary texts in literature prior to the *Heroides* open up the possibility that the women will challenge, if not to dismantle, their representations in the "master fictions" or the "source texts." They do not seize upon this possibility. While an epistolary text, by generic convention, presents a delicate balance between the demands of the writer and those of the reader over what the writer puts on paper, the heroines highlight not their own freedom as epistolary writers to shape the narrative as they see fit but rather the constraints placed upon what they write by their all-consuming preoccupation with their addressees. In addition, the salient features of each woman's self-presentation recur from epistle to epistle throughout the *Heroides*, rendering each woman like the next in significant ways, and thus inviting the criticism of monotony, prevalent in scholarship on this collection. The heroine's importance and the nuanced characterization in the prior text from which she emerges become inconsequential to the Ovidian text. Penelope, arguably the most independent and ambiguous of Greek heroines,

emerges from her own narrative as a devoted wife who demands for herself the title *Penelope coniunx semper Ulixis* ("Penelope always the wife of Ulysses," 83). Similarly Briseis strives in her epistle to highlight her servile devotion to Achilles. She discovers characteristics in which to clothe herself not in the words of the Homeric Briseis but in her objectified depiction as "war-prize" and signifier of honor, seen through the (male) eyes of the Greek army. For the Ovidian Deianira, a glance at the "source text" uncovers an already surprisingly passive heroine. The Ovidian heroine, nevertheless, manages in her own telling to insist on a narrative that features Hercules as its heroic protagonist to whom she is yoked as an *inaequalis iuvencus* ("unequal bull," 29).

I want now to suggest, however, that these self-portraits, rather than inviting criticism, should instead raise questions. Why, when the heroine receives the opportunity to tell her own story, does she decide on these self-presentations? Why does she refuse potentially empowering narrative techniques offered to her in her characterization in prior texts as well as by the generic conventions of epistolary discourse? The heroine seems to be writing her story, a fiction that the epistolary form, above all, encourages the reader to accept. In fact, however, Ovid controls her pen, ventriloquizes her voice, but in the most unobtrusive manner possible. By choosing the epistolary form, the poet promotes the illusion that, if one had access to these women's thoughts (through subjective first person narrative), they would reveal a strong commitment to a world that demands powerful, central men and marginal, helplessly devoted women.

On the one hand, the reader remembers the voice of Ovid animating his heroines. The Ovidian Deianira incorporates into her self-portrait the metaphorical idea present in the Sophoclean text that she is a "writing tablet" or a passive medium for male writing and reading. Indeed, on one level, this image serves as an apt metaphor for the *Heroides* in general; for Ovid's heroines are all male-authored texts that will be read by other men.²¹⁷ By concentrating on epistolary conventions we move in the direction of interpreting the Ovidian heroines as characters constructed to conform with a male fantasy that finds it comforting to imagine insignificant women and powerful heroes.

On the other hand, however, one cannot help but consider whether perhaps such a reading is only part of a larger answer, in

and of itself too easy, as well as too dismissive of Ovid's subtler abilities as a poet and as an observer of women and men, especially those involved in erotic relationships. And now it is time to return to the interconnection, so common in literary epistles, especially those composed by women and erotic in nature, between letter writing and deceit. If expectations born from literary precedents lead us to link together the letters of women in love and duplicitous writing, we must consider the possibility that cunning plays a role in the heroine's epistolary narrative. When she so explicitly points to the tremendous extent of her addressee's influence over the contents of her letter, can this be a deceitful move? When she allows the effect her words will have on him dictate what she writes, when she portrays herself as helpless and her addressee as all-powerful, is she shrewdly calculating her own advantage? And further, does the erotic nature of the relationship between heroine and hero shed any light on her duplicity? Can love, or desire, serve to clarify both if and why she writes deceitfully? In an attempt to answer these questions, we now turn our attention to love, and to elegy, the *Heroides'* second generic framework.

2

Women into Woman

Voices of Desire

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magical and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Love Letters

Chapter 1 examined the various ways in which the Ovidian heroines contrive to manipulate the conventions of the epistolary genre, seeking to present themselves as marginal participants in their own life-stories. We have discovered, through intertextual readings and considerations of epistolarity, that, granted the opportunity to tell her own story, the heroine prefers to remove herself to the margins of her tale and to empower the absent hero in her stead. In addition, we spent some time considering the role of the male poet in the construction of his female characters. The convention that the epistle conveys in an unmediated fashion the voice of the letter writer allows Ovid to efface his presence and to set forth instead the elaborate fiction of granting woman a voice. The self-presentation of the women, however, led us to question the illusion that Ovid tries so carefully to construct—that we are listening to authentic female voices.

Yet the heroine's yearning for narrative self-subordination requires further scrutiny, a second look. By emphasizing Ovid's

choice of transvestite ventriloquism in these letters we perhaps too hastily dismiss the Ovidian women as simplistic and readily identifiable masculine constructions. To allow a more complex picture of the heroines to emerge from the Ovidian text, we must now consider a very significant element of epistolary fictions. Armed with a set of specific generic expectations for ancient literary letters, we anticipate deceit on the part of the epistolary writer in the narrative she weaves as well as in her self-representation.¹ In this light we must consider whether the self-portrait she advances in her epistolary tale is really a means toward absolute disempowerment, or, on the contrary, whether such self-effacement actually underlies a duplicitous rhetorical strategy by which the heroine aims to establish herself in a position of strength. We must ask what the heroines seek to achieve through self-representation, and why rhetorically manipulated self-depictions seem to be effective tools in their hands. The answers will reveal not a link between the heroines and masculine projections of women but instead a connection between the heroines' self-portraits and the way that women in general experience desire.

The heroine goes to great lengths to emphasize her lack of importance and to underscore her complete preoccupation with her addressee. She repeatedly offers the impression through the story she tells and the characters she creates that she is single-mindedly guided in what she writes by the impact she imagines her words will have on her absent lover/husband. And yet, if rhetorical tactics motivate her choices for self-construction, perhaps her insistent denials of her own significance and her simultaneous proclamations of her addressee's all-encompassing importance represent the core of a strategy by which the heroine seeks to manipulate and control her reader, thus exerting her own power. Once we acknowledge the possibility of the writer's duplicity, we must return to her narrative and explore more closely the extent to which, despite appearances to the contrary, the heroine actually wields the power that an epistolary writer enjoys over her composition.

In chapter 1, we touched on moments when the heroines we were considering, for all their self-effacement, seemed to flirt with the possibility of portraying themselves as powerful and significant. For an instant Penelope questions the value of the

Trojan War, upholding the primary importance of her own feelings and reactions to it.² Briseis fleetingly attempts to usurp all credit for being the cause of Achilles' legendary wrath, briefly erasing the sense, so prominent in the *Iliad*, that she is merely a pawn in a negotiation for honor among men.³ It remains more difficult to find places in Deianira's letter in which the heroine flaunts her importance, since she so assiduously constructs herself as even more self-effacing than Sophocles' very passive heroine. And yet, perhaps she hints at her power as an impious destroyer of her husband in the final refrain with which she brings her letter to its conclusion.⁴ We did not probe these claims to power and authority too deeply, however, because they were far fewer and less dominant than the heroines' forceful and contradictory self-presentations as helpless and insignificant.

By concentrating on the conventions of the epistolary genre and especially on how the heroines so carefully stress the pervasive influence that their addressees wield over the heroines' own narrative choices, we pay attention to the women's helplessness and marginality, or primarily to one aspect of the disjointed personalities that the heroines create for themselves. Altering the focus of our investigation, we now return to the heroines' self-portraits. Once we set aside epistolary conventions, we became free to explore the multilayered aspects of the heroines' identities. Throughout the chapter we shall continue to observe the heroine's very prominent and rather distressing tendency toward self-denigration. In addition, however, we shall now begin to give full weight to the heroine's simultaneous, and quite emphatically contradictory, claim to power and authority. We shall discover that, in a hauntingly repetitive fashion, five quite different heroines all conceive of themselves, on the most basic level, as an impossibly disjointed amalgamation of disunified characteristics.

In fact, many literary critics have censured Ovid not only for the repetitious quality of the heroines in this collection but also for the pervasive sense that in the final analysis the women's characters remain incoherent.⁵ Recently, espousing a diametrically opposed view, interpreters have sought to sweep incoherence, and especially repetition, under the carpet, emphasizing instead the qualities unique to each individual heroine.⁶ In my opinion, neither of these views elucidates Ovid's text in a

complete and satisfactory fashion. It seems counterproductive not only to denounce but also to deny either the repetitious or the incoherent nature of the heroines' self-portraits. On the contrary, both remain indisputable elements of the Ovidian collection, elements that, it seems to me, must be taken into account and explained by an interpretation of these poems. Going one step farther, I would argue that they actually provide the key to reading this text. Rather than finding fault with a youthful poet, or vigorously defending the artist by denying the existence of the problems, let us instead pose the question: why would the heroines, one repeating the other, *choose* to fashion themselves as possessing disparate characteristics that refuse to cohere?

To broach this question I now consider the *Heroides* in the light of the second generic category to which the text belongs—elegy. The elegiac framework, as well as the conspicuous echoes of other Ovidian amatory works,⁷ provides a strong invitation—perhaps, more forcefully, a generic injunction—to read the *Heroides* as a text that explores desire and the heroines as constructions within an erotic context.⁸ The *Heroides* are a collection not merely of letters but, more precisely, of *love* letters. The concept of desire, evoked both by the metrical form of these poems (elegy) and by their content (love affairs), leads me to psychoanalysis, more specifically to the work of the twentieth-century French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who, defining his project as a “return to Freud,” relentlessly engages with, rethinks, and amplifies Freudian theories of desire.⁹ The amorous relationship between hero and heroine, when examined through a Lacanian lens, offers a solution to the complex ways in which the Ovidian heroine chooses to characterize herself and her lover. By examining both masculine and feminine desire in Lacanian theory we shall observe that the structure of desire underlies the heroine's lack of cohesive identity and the repetition we experience from one woman to the next. It will also become clear, as I draw out the points of intersection between Lacan and Ovid, that the *Heroides* make perceptive and sensitive observations about the nature of women and their fate in any (heterosexual) erotic relationship.

I begin with a necessarily rather simplistic and schematic distillation of Lacanian ideas. According to Lacan, masculine and feminine desire represent two utterly different and incompatible ways of organizing desire.¹⁰ Her desire is for an “unsatisfied

desire." Feminine desire drives the woman to perform a variety of roles in an effort to render herself the eternal object of a man's desire. Masculine desire does not function in a complementary fashion to its feminine counterpart by yearning for a shape-shifting woman. Masculine desire, as we shall see shortly, is a desire for an object of an altogether different kind, a desire for an "impossible desire." The Lacanian understanding of feminine desire sheds light on the Ovidian heroines' self-representations. The various, self-contradictory, and irreconcilable postures they assume all stem from the heroines' yearning to pique the heroes' desire. Each woman chooses to embrace alternative and competing identities in an effort to compel her beloved to enshrine her as the object of his desire. Moreover, the basic structure that Lacan perceives at the heart of masculine and feminine desire remains more or less unchanging in the West (at least for subjects who have not undergone extensive Lacanian analysis!). All subjects who have taken up a feminine position desire according to similar, general, overarching principles or structures; the same is true for masculine subjects. Ultimately the iterative quality of desire will explain the repetitive nature of Ovid's text.

In bold strokes, reinforced by the relentless repetition from one epistle to the next, the *Heroides* uncover the unsettling aspects of desire, especially of feminine desire. The poems showcase the dark side of love, the profoundly disturbing results for a woman arising from the myth of finding one's other half in which society compels us all to believe.¹¹ One by one the heroines present themselves as performing a series of roles designed to arouse the heroes' desire; feminine desire, by its very structure, demands that the women behave thus. Considered in conjunction with Lacan, Ovid's text reveals that the heroine suffers the fate of a woman in an erotic context; she becomes no more than the particular string of roles she performs. We must amend our earlier position that the heroines represent merely fantasized, masculine projections of the woman. The *Heroides* offer us a more complicated picture of women that, when viewed through a Lacanian lens, indicates an astute study of gender-based, socio-cultural realities.

Because I find Lacanian ideas about desire so fruitful to a study of Ovid's heroines, and because I do not assume a familiarity with the tenets of Lacanian theory, I shall briefly lay out some

critical concepts that will be central to my interpretation of the *Heroides*. I do not make claims here to being exhaustive with respect to Lacanian thought, which often changes and develops over the course of his writings, nor am I seeking to present a doctrinally rigid application of his work. I am consciously selecting from within his system of thought elements that serve to shed light, in productive ways, on a literary interpretation of Ovid's text.

Jacques Lacan on Subjectivity and Desire: Or, What Does a Woman Want?

The project of Jacques Lacan encompasses a vast and complex series of writings on human subjectivity. As is often the case in psychoanalytic literature, in Lacan's work the concepts of subjectivity and of sexuality intersect and intertwine until they become inseparable. More succinctly, to be a subject, according to Lacan, is to desire. I begin, therefore, by tracing the emergence of the subject and of the subject's desire in Lacanian thought. In addition, the particular structure of a subject's desire indicates whether the subject, in the process of coming into existence, has adopted a masculine or a feminine "subject position." Since Ovid's *Heroides* features heterosexual love stories, I shall consider the two Lacanian subject positions, as well as the two very distinct forms that desire takes for these subjects. Considering the quasi-perennial and socially mandated attempts of masculine and feminine subjects to join together as heterosexual couples, and underscoring the impossibility that two people can form a perfect union, Lacan proclaims: "there is no such thing as a sexual relationship."¹² The ideal of "true love," the pernicious myth that drives us to seek our perfect complement, our other half, our soul-mate, is impossible, not to say unhealthy. Relations between the sexes are not complementary; the structures of masculine and feminine desire remain fundamentally incompatible.

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, becoming a subject, for Lacan, is most of all an experience of alienation produced by encountering the Other. The child takes its¹³ place within a family, within a community, within a society, each with a set of cultural, moral, religious, legal strictures. This realm of law, culture, and

social exchange forms what Lacan calls the Symbolic order, an order that takes its shape in and through language. This will be the first Other that the child must face and to which it must yield. A child who achieves “normal” development and does not succumb to psychosis, learns to speak its family’s (or community’s) language and simultaneously begins to fill the place that language, or the signifier, has already established for it. Even before the child is born, its parents speak about it, perhaps even give it a name (a signifier). At any rate, long before the child has had time to develop its own self, the parents have provided it with a name and have formulated and articulated, according to society’s norms and in language, many of their own desires for the child. The first step along the self-alienating road to subjectivity for the child becomes its emergence into the place already created for it in the Symbolic order by its parents.¹⁴

On the one hand, the child accepts that it will use its parents’ language, and further, that language will be used about the child. On the other hand, the parents’ desire, in particular the mother’s desire, also molds the child. For the child to become a subject, according to Lacan, a space or a lack must open up.¹⁵ The mother will be the one to create this space by proving to the child that she too is a subject, or, in other words, that she is lacking and therefore desires. As the mother reveals her own incompleteness, the child tries to fill her lack with itself. Apprehending that its mother lacks, the child wants to fill the hole—to be what she desires. Here the child again experiences subjectivity as a fundamentally alienating concept, again an encounter with an other.¹⁶ The subject learns to desire (or, in other words, to be a subject) only by emulating the (m)other’s desire, by constructing its desire so that it matches hers.

But the child and the mother do not and cannot, within society at large, form a perfect dyad in which the child entirely fulfills the mother’s desire. Something steps in to separate mother and child, a third term, which Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father.¹⁷ Often referring to the Name-of-the-Father as the paternal metaphor, Lacan maintains that the father does not necessarily indicate an actual biological father but rather stands in for the law or authority that prohibits the asocial positioning of the child in a relationship of plenitude with the mother that requires nothing external to sustain it.¹⁸ The paternal metaphor disrupts the child’s

harmonious yet illusory vision of a perfect unity between mother and child, pointing out that the mother's desire reaches beyond the child, and thus compels the child to seek out other, more socially acceptable ways of expressing its desire. This refusal to allow the imaginary perfect unity of the mother-child dyad, this denial to the child of a hypothetical wholeness and the pure pleasure or satisfaction it entails, represents the castration that Lacan considers the lot of each and every subject.

Further, the destruction of the hypothetical unity between mother and child leaves behind for the child the sense that something has been lost. In a retrospectively constructed narrative, when child and mother are forced apart, the child comes to believe that something has been removed from him or her. The sense of loss renders the child lacking and therefore desirous. The lost object receives the Lacanian appellation "*objet a*," an object ineffable to the subject but that possesses the all-important function as the cause of the subject's desire. According to Lacan, "*objet a*" can take on many incarnations—the gaze, the voice, the breast—to name a few. As the cause of desire, "*objet a*" rather than a particular person gives rise to the subject's desire. In other words, the subject begins to desire a particular individual based on that individual's possession of the particular "*objet a*" that sets the subject's desire in motion.¹⁹ It is significant to remember here that "*objet a*" thrives most of all in fantasy, that the lost object never existed, and therefore no actual object can bring absolute satisfaction and pleasure to the subject. The lack of satisfaction, in fact lack pure and simple, drives the subject to continue to desire, metonymically transferring desire from one object to the next. Moreover, the subject remains unaware, at a conscious level, of "*objet a*." Certainly the subject would never attribute the reason for choosing a partner to a particular quality of gaze or voice; consciously, the subject fashions a socially acceptable narrative for his/her choice of partners—s/he is giving, caring, a good person, for example.

Castration implies a loss of satisfaction or pleasure, of what Lacan calls *jouissance*. "*Objet a*" comes into existence at the moment of the loss, "as the object (now lost) which provided that *jouissance*, as a kind of rem(a)inder of that lost *jouissance*."²⁰ But the subject does not simply accept the loss imposed on, and to a certain degree chosen by, him/her.²¹ S/he puts into play

strategies to come to grips with the loss, seeking ways to reclaim some of the pleasure s/he renounced, but now in a manner sanctioned by the Other (society in general, represented by any number of people such as parents, teachers, religious leaders, etc.). The subject struggles with his/her lack, constructing for him/herself an illusion of wholeness by denying the split that exists by definition at the heart of subjectivity. This illusory sense of completeness emerges through the subject's stubborn, yet unconscious, relationship to "objet a," and this relationship forms what Lacan names the "fundamental fantasy."²²

Moreover, the particular way in which a subject constructs his/her relationship to "objet a" represents his/her "subject position." The way one reacts to the fact of castration, the fantasy that one puts into play to deny lack and that structures one's desire, serves to indicate whether the subject has taken up a subject position as masculine or feminine. For Lacan, therefore, anatomy is not destiny; biology does not necessarily determine gender. Because of his/her emergence *qua* subject through a self-alienating encounter with the Other as language, as law, as desire, the subject constructs his/her desire according to a "fundamental fantasy" whose structure indicates whether the subject desires following a masculine or a feminine position.²³ A subject is, therefore, by definition, a sexed subject, with sexuality no less than subjectivity a construction of language and of the Symbolic that a subject is forced to (choose to) assume.

Sexual difference then, for Lacan, emerges as two separate responses to the fact of castration and manifests itself as two separate and irreconcilable ways of desiring.²⁴ A masculine subject, faced with lack both in the subject and in the Other (in an erotic relationship, his partner), desires according to a fantasy that serves to remedy the lack at the level of the subject. Seeking to veil the fact of castration, he strives to possess the "objet a" that, when obtained, will provide him with the wholeness as subject he so craves. Struggling to deny the importance of the Other to his desire, and thereby proving his own self-reliance, the masculine subject attempts to remove from the Other all significance beyond the role as vessel for "objet a." In other words, he desires his partner not *qua* person but rather only *qua* "objet a."²⁵ The masculine subject's desire is, according to Lacan, an impossible desire, most of all because in doing everything he possibly can to

refuse the importance of the Other, the masculine subject merely underscores his ineluctable attachment.²⁶

On the other hand, Lacan continues, the feminine subject cherishes an unsatisfied desire. Faced with castration as the fate of the subject, she attempts to suture the lack that she perceives in the Other. Dependent on the desire of the Other, or desiring to be desired, the feminine subject spends her time first considering what causes the Other to desire and then transforming herself into that particular "objet a." In other words, her fantasy is one of becoming the object that will complete the Other, and therefore, forever probing to figure out what he seeks in an effort to set his desire in motion, she acts out various roles as a direct response to what she perceives he wants.²⁷ This gives feminine desire an aspect of masquerade. But desire only exists, by definition, as we have seen, because of lack. Therefore, although struggling desperately to manufacture herself as the cause of the Other's desire, the feminine subject does not, under any circumstances, want to satisfy the desire, since satisfaction would be equivalent to the death of desire and consequently of her position as desired object. Seeking to remain the object of desire, she must then strive to keep the Other's desire constantly in play (i.e., unsatisfied), thus constructing the Other as subject of desire but subject only according to her rules and only of a desire that she manipulates.²⁸

I want to underline here one particular aspect of feminine desire. In her quest to render herself desirable, the feminine subject aligns her desires with those of her partner. When she scrutinizes what causes him to desire and reconstructs herself in the guise of that cause, she attempts to put herself in his place and to desire as if she were he. This aspect of the feminine subject's desire can lead her to perform some rather surprising roles, or refashion herself in some rather striking ways, often strongly identifying herself with another woman who is/has been desired by the man whose object of desire the feminine subject wishes to be.²⁹

The notion of identification leads me to the final Lacanian concept that I wish to discuss before I move on to my readings of Ovid's *Heroides*. While I have spoken of the emergence of the subject into the Symbolic order, the subject also participates in two other orders simultaneously: the Imaginary, and the Real. Lacan's concept of the Imaginary will be important for our purposes. While the Symbolic is the realm of law and language,

specular images and representations mark the Imaginary. The Imaginary is the province of the ego, an illusory image each of us has of ourself, an image of a whole, complete, coherent, understandable self. Identification with externally produced specular images or representations both creates and bolsters this image of self. In his early attempts to explain the Imaginary, Lacan makes use of something he calls the "mirror stage," drawing on a child's interest in its image as reflected by a mirror, or by anything else that serves to reflect an image back to the child.³⁰ A child confronts a series of images that represent how others see him/her. For example, a mother might hold her child up to a mirror and say "that's you," or a father might announce "you're daddy's good girl." Eventually, the child, accepting such images as fixed and stable, learns to identify these images with him/herself. The ego forms, as the subject does, in a self-alienating process.

For Lacan, however, the mirror stage remains metaphorical, referring, strictly speaking, neither to an actual set of experiences with a looking glass, nor to a particular series of moments in childhood, but serving as a way to explain identification, an aspect he considers fundamental to the structure of subjectivity. Because the ego comes into existence through grafting a sense of self onto an externally produced image, we constantly seek to reinforce our externally produced and externally validated self-image through intersubjective or dual relationships with others whom we imagine to be "just like us," (our mirror image, so to speak), or, on the other side of the same coin, "not like us at all."³¹ In Imaginary relations, one compares oneself to, and/or distinguishes oneself from, an other. The erotic relationship, or the love relationship, provides a primary example of an interpersonal, dual relation that can play itself out in significant ways through Imaginary identification. The feminine subject, as we have just seen, because of the structure of her desire, identifies not with her partner but with another woman whom she imagines as arousing desire in her partner.³² For the masculine subject, because of the narcissistic quality of his desire, identification occurs with his chosen partner in the erotic relationship.

Not surprisingly, identification, or the constant blurring of self and other, gives rise to feelings of profound ambivalence toward the other.³³ By taking on an image of something outside itself the subject is structured "as a rival with himself."³⁴ At certain times,

feelings of aggression, or even of hatred, arise toward the other who, viewed as some sort of double, threatens our sense of our place in the world. On the one hand, one seeks to differentiate oneself from another who resembles one too closely, and such a desire often manifests itself in an aggressive devaluation of the other. On the other hand, however, the subject experiences feelings of narcissistic adoration for the image, idealizing the other because one sees in the idealized other's wholeness and stability a mirror image of the self. If the other, who embodies our mirror image, is whole, then so too are we.

When Lacan Meets Ovid: Readings in Feminine Desire

Let us turn now to Ovid and to five epistles that represent what one might call the "classic case" of abandonment, and that, therefore, seem representative of the collection as a whole. Through readings of the letters from Dido, Phyllis,³⁵ Ariadne, Medea, and Hypsipyle, I explore how Lacanian theory serves as a fruitful tool for illuminating the *Heroides*. Faced with abandonment, the heroines attempt to present themselves to the absent heroes as objects worthy of their continuing desire. The pursuit of idyllic "true love," Lacan warns, engenders no more than a "comedy,"³⁶ and a very dark one at that. Nevertheless, Ovid's heroines pursue the ideal, the myth of finding wholeness with another. Relentlessly, through repetition that mimics the very nature of desire, the *Heroides* explore the results of the erotic relationship on the feminine participant. Desiring to be the cause of the hero's desire, the heroine begins a performance that leads her to play out various roles in relation to him. Each guise she assumes is a calculated one; she seeks through each role she acts out to manipulate the hero and his desire as if she were a puppeteer pulling the strings. In this way her various attempts at self-portrayal represent a rhetorical strategy that the heroine employs with the implicit aim of establishing herself as the eternal object of the hero's desire. Lacanian theory allows us to see that the Ovidian text in fact offers an in-depth examination of feminine desire.

And yet, even as we appreciate the ways in which these poems lay out an intricate and perceptive portrayal of women in love, we must be vigilant to a second interpretative possibility that

arises from observing the heroines' performative natures. Although one heroine after another presents herself as a shape-shifter, her freedom to construct herself seems to have severe restrictions placed upon it. Each woman's repertoire of performances, as we shall see, is limited to two. While Lacanian theory points to the feminine subject's penchant for countless masquerades, the Ovidian text allows each heroine only two acts, alternately powerful and helpless, thereby highlighting a sameness among the various, disparate women. And further, the heroines go to great lengths to underscore their similarities, self-consciously acting out their roles in ways that recall their counterparts within the collection.

While the performances the feminine subject acts out to capture her partner's desire may be all we apprehend of her, Lacan argues, nevertheless there is something beyond the performance that exists but remains ineffable. The inscrutable mystery at the core of women renders it impossible to formulate any generalizing principle that succeeds in describing all women; "there's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal."³⁷ The *Heroides*, however, suggest an opposite conclusion. Through the relentless repetition of narrative and character for fifteen epistles the Ovidian text contrives to represent Woman's homogeneity. Leaving the heroines to perform a carefully circumscribed series of performances that suspiciously resemble one another, the *Heroides* create Woman from women. As we examine the heroines' self-portraits we must watch how Ovid constructs Woman while we simultaneously consider the subtlety and depth in the observations about women and desire that this text makes. A nagging question will resurface, a thread that we must pick up from chapter 1 and keep in the back of our minds until chapter 3. To what extent can one distinguish between the voice of a man writing like a woman and the utterances of a woman writing? Or, to put it somewhat differently, to what extent do these heroines remain, despite the profound realities about women present in Ovid's poems, constructions of a male poet?

WHAT DOES A HERO WANT?: *HEROIDES* 2, 7, AND 10

Ariadne, Dido, and Phyllis share a similar story. Each woman falls in love with a stranger arriving in her native country, a man

to whom she entrusts herself regardless of all possible consequences. Dido and Phyllis, unmarried and rulers of their respective countries, feel compassion for a noble stranger shipwrecked upon their shores, offer to help him rebuild his fleet, and eventually fall in love with him. Ariadne conceives a passion for a stranger sent from Athens to her country as a sacrificial victim for the Minotaur. Overcome by her emotions, Ariadne devises a plan to save Theseus from the beast and from his labyrinth, offering him a thread by means of which he might retrace his steps out of the maze.

All three heroines yield to the men they love. Dido and Phyllis offer the heroes kingship over their realms; Ariadne leaves home to travel to Athens with Theseus. But each hero abandons the woman who loves him. Demophoon leaves Thrace for a visit home with a promise to return to Phyllis. His promise remains unfulfilled. Aeneas, ever driven by his greater destiny to found Rome, casts aside Dido's pleas and offers of Carthage as a city to call his own and heads for the shores of Italy. Theseus escapes from Crete with Ariadne at his side but leaves her behind on the island of Dia before they reach their destination of Athens, departing with his crew while she sleeps.

The similarities to one another that these heroines exhibit, however, extend beyond narrative pattern. While it is indeed clear that their tales belong to a shared paradigm for the literary portrayal of the abandoned woman, Ovid's Dido, Ariadne, and Phyllis take their resemblances to extremes. In the desperation caused by their abandonment, the heroines compose epistles to their departed lovers. The women carefully design an argument whose aim is to reawaken the heroes' former desire. Hoping to recapture her position as object of the hero's desire, each woman constructs herself as a considered response to what she imagines the hero to want. As we shall see, the overarching structure of the argument remains the same for all three heroines; indeed, they present themselves in two contradictory roles. Strikingly, in their self-portraits they appear simultaneously authoritative and helpless, serving in both capacities to present the *heroes* as absolutely powerful and self-sufficient.

Moreover, the similarities do not end there. On multiple levels the *Heroides* deny uniqueness to the protagonists. A dense web of allusive references, sometimes overt, at other times far more

subtle, link the Ovidian heroines to each other, as Dido, Ariadne, and Phyllis discover yet more ways to appear alike. On the one hand, Dido, Ariadne, and Phyllis litter their epistles with allusions to other famous, abandoned, literary heroines; in the self-portraits of the Ovidian women we see traces of Euripides' and Apollonius Rhodius' Medea, Catullus' Ariadne, Virgil's Dido, and perhaps even Callimachus' Phyllis, from a portion of the *Aetia* that is no longer extant.³⁸ I shall point out the most significant of these references throughout my readings of the poems. On the other hand, the Ovidian heroines also make use of textual allusion to construct similarities between themselves and other heroines within Ovid's collection. Abandoned by their lovers, Dido, Phyllis, and Ariadne have roles to step into that have been well defined by other women in prior literature as well as by their counterparts in the *Heroides*. Ultimately, the various resemblances the heroines draw, throughout the *Heroides*, to each other as well as to other literary heroines serve to underscore how the Ovidian text fashions women into Woman.

Let us begin with a brief glance at Catullus 64, primary "source text" for Ovid's version of Ariadne.³⁹ In her abandonment the Catullan heroine indicts all men, parading Theseus' faithlessness as paradigmatic of the behavior of a male lover. Her tone is harsh and biting. For her, Theseus is every man.⁴⁰ It stands out, then, as a striking reversal when Ovid's Ariadne construes the lament to express precisely the opposite sentiment; Ovid's heroine insists that she is any woman. With the somewhat distancing *nunc ego non tantum quae sum passura recordor, / sed quaecumque potest ulla relictæ pati* ("now I call to mind not only the things that I am about to suffer, but whatever things any abandoned woman can suffer," 79–80), the heroine denies the particularities of her situation and links herself in the reader's mind with all other abandoned women, Dido and Phyllis included.⁴¹

In her retrospective review of her abandonment, Phyllis too discovers a precedent for her situation and reproaches Demophoon for not treating her, or his relationship with her, as unique and distinct. While Ariadne widens the scope of her desertion to ponder the resemblances between her fate and the fate of many other women in erotic relationships, Phyllis narrows the perspective, comparing herself to one other, very specific woman.

Drawing the deserted Ariadne into her epistle—*sedit in ingenio Cressa relictæ tuo* ("the abandoned Cretan woman was fixed in your imagination," 76)—Phyllis chides Demophoon for duplicating Theseus' earlier deceptive behavior toward his lover. Theseus is, after all, Demophoon's father and therefore a likely role model to his son. In the process she reveals that she imagines herself as a second Ariadne.

Dido also highlights her lack of uniqueness. In so doing she ensures the validity of this self-assessment; for in emphasizing her lack of individuality she replicates a tendency we have seen both in the Ovidian Ariadne and in Phyllis. Indeed, Dido reproduces both of the ways in which the other two heroines highlight their lack of distinctness. Although the middle section of the hexameter at line 17 is corrupt,⁴² the sense of the extant portion nevertheless remains clear. The Carthaginian queen considers herself so capable of being replicated that she imagines a new love for Aeneas whom the hero chooses as a substitute Dido. She accusingly asserts: *alter amor tibi . . . et altera Dido: / quamque iterum fallas, altera danda fides* ("there will be another love for you . . . and another Dido and another pledge will have to be given for you to break again," 17–18). He will find himself another Dido, not another woman or another wife.⁴³ When she decides that he will continue their established patterns of behavior, without skipping a beat, simply exchanging one Dido for another, she recalls the ease with which the Ovidian Ariadne conflates herself with other women. Moreover, Dido does not even consider herself the original love-object that gave rise to a series of spin-off objects. Instead, in a manner that duplicates Phyllis' self-construction as a second Ariadne, Dido attempts to create herself in the image of Creusa, Aeneas' first wife. Dido imagines herself as a ghost, haunting Aeneas after her death (69–70). She will appear before his eyes, almost indistinguishable from Creusa whose shade appeared before Aeneas in Troy.⁴⁴ This self-characterization as a "replacement Creusa" continues ten lines later when Dido starkly asserts:

. . . neque enim tua fallere lingua
incipit a nobis, primaque plector ego.
si quaeras, ubi sit formosi mater Iuli,
occidit a duro sola relictæ viro. (81–84)

[For neither did your tongue begin to deceive with me,
nor am I the first to suffer. If you seek where the mother
of beautiful Iulus is, she died alone, left behind by a
harsh man.]

In Dido's version of the story Aeneas lied to Creusa and left her to die alone; Creusa becomes an abandoned woman, the model for Dido's own desertion as Aeneas repeats his earlier actions, this time with the Carthaginian queen.

The fact that they highlight their similarities to other women, however, does not mean that Dido, Phyllis, and Ariadne believe that their departed lovers should regard them as easily replaceable. On the contrary, the letters betray a sense of urgency that the heroines retain or regain their positions as objects of the heroes' desire. Barchiesi, in his commentary on *Heroides* 2, notes the striking way in which Phyllis refers to herself in the opening of her epistle, as *Rhodopeia Phyllis*, mentioning both her name and her place of origin—"Thracian Phyllis"—almost as if she were introducing herself.⁴⁵ He suggests that the heroine reveals in this very first line the pathetic quality of her situation; she expresses the isolation she feels in Thrace, so geographically distant from Demophoon in Athens, as well as the fear that she has of being forgotten. She remains, the argument continues, incapable of perceiving that Demophoon never had any intention of returning, and that, from the beginning, he played the role of eager lover to get what he wanted.⁴⁶ Yet I believe that there is more to Phyllis' marked need to identify herself. In fact, as we shall see, "naïve young girl" is one of the roles Phyllis consciously acts out for Demophoon.

So perhaps we should reframe the question. Is she merely a woman who does not understand the complex world of erotic relationships, who is too naïve to realize that she has been abandoned? Why does Phyllis have such a terror that Demophoon might erase her from his memory? Indeed, the fear that he might forget her resurfaces in the letter more overtly when she makes the distressed claim, *iamque tibi excidimus, nullam, puto, Phyllida nosti* ("already you have forgotten me, and you know no Phyllis, I suppose," 105). The letter writer's use of the third person singular to speak about herself strikes one as odd, as if "Phyllis" were somehow detachable from the "I" and dependent for her

existence on Demophoon's acknowledgement of her. Being forgotten appears tantamount to ceasing to exist; the terror becomes understandable. If ceasing to exist, at least in Phyllis' mind, is the price of being abandoned by her lover, then her insistence on clinging to the hope that Demophoon will one day return indicates more than an inability to see through the sophisticated amatory deceit of a former lover. She has a reason to want to remain the object of the hero's desire practically at any cost; her existence is at stake. Her need to be acknowledged by Demophoon as his beloved, rather than her lack of sophistication (quite the contrary), introduces a self-contradictory note into the heroine's words. She understands the hero's treachery toward her. She expresses indignation at Demophoon's deception and at her earlier naïve trust in his fidelity (99–120). Nevertheless, Phyllis reveals an unwavering hope that he will turn his ships back toward Thrace, accept the lands offered to him in dowry, and take her again as the object of his desire.

When Demophoon departed, he tearfully issued instructions that Phyllis should wait for him to come back (95–98). After four months of waiting Phyllis composes her epistle (5). A textual problem raises questions about the promised time of return: did Demophoon swear to return in one month, as the manuscripts read, or four, according to a proposed emendation (3)?⁴⁷ Has Phyllis been patient, allowing three additional months to elapse beyond the promised date of return before she utters any complaint, or has she rather impatiently taken up pen and paper on the very day Demophoon proposed for his return? The emendation that would render equivalent Phyllis' wait and Demophoon's promised period of absence seems unnecessary and out of character with Phyllis' insistence on maintaining her position as object of Demophoon's desire. She has waited four times longer than the appointed period, and she still refuses to accept the fact that she has been abandoned. Rather, she will continue to wait for the hero, preferring to depict him as delinquent rather than faithless. Her characterization does not demonstrate an inability to apprehend Demophoon's treachery, but rather a stubborn denial that their affair has come to an end. Indicating that she remains capable of seeing reality while refusing to relinquish her illusion that Demophoon is on his way back to her, she poses a series of rhetorical questions and reaches a crescendo with her

answer: *exspectem, qui me numquam visurus abisti? / exspectem pelago vela negata meo? / et tamen exspecto* ("Am I to wait for you who left in order never to see me again? Am I to wait for sails denied to my sea? And nevertheless, I wait," 99–101). Moreover, Phyllis so wishes to sustain the notion that Demophoon continues to desire her that she is consciously willing to endure the strong censure of her subjects.⁴⁸ Despite the knowledge that her people grumble and feel spurned by her choice of a foreign lover (81ff), Phyllis spends day and night wandering the shoreline casting her glance toward every approaching ship (121–26). In an even more overt display, as each ship enters the harbor, she foregoes all proper restraint and splashes out into the water (127–28) to check its crew. In the process she explicitly recasts herself yet again as Ariadne, also a forsaken woman roaming the beach.⁴⁹

Ovid's Dido, in the face of her abandonment, likewise reveals a powerful yearning to hold on, virtually at all costs, to her position as object of Aeneas' desire. She exclaims: *si pudet uxoris, non nupta, sed hospita dicar; / dum tua sit Dido, quidlibet esse feret* ("If you are ashamed to have me as your wife, let me be called not wife but hostess. Provided that she is your Dido, she will endure to be anything," 167–68). Allusions and cross-references abound in this statement. The Ovidian Dido clearly echoes a famous passage in the *Aeneid* in which Virgil's Dido pointedly addresses the departing Aeneas as "guest" (*hospes*) rather than as "husband."⁵⁰ Further, the Ovidian Phyllis, calling to mind the Virgilian text but also providing an internal echo for the Ovidian Dido's striking self-designation, introduces herself in *Heroides* 2 as Demophoon's *hospita* ("hostess," 1), and later refers to the hero as *hospes* ("guest," 147).⁵¹ Like Phyllis before her, the Carthaginian queen in the Ovidian text informs Aeneas that she is prepared to endure strict societal censure for behaving as *uxor* ("wife") when she was merely a *hospita* ("hostess"). Indeed, she will face anything at all, as long as he acknowledges that she is the object of his desire, *his* Dido.

The heroine's fierce craving to maintain an unbroken connection between herself and her now-absent lover manifests itself in one final fashion. Ariadne,⁵² Dido, and Phyllis all express a strong wish to link themselves ineluctably to their respective heroes by means of a narrative that lasts for all time. Although Theseus has abandoned her, Ariadne struggles to ensure that in

some way they will remain joined together forever; her solution is an insistence that they be united eternally in story. Ariadne imagines Theseus' return home. In a rather striking divergence from the Catullan "source text," when the Ovidian Ariadne imagines Theseus' return to Athens, she conjures up only how he will gain fame for his heroic exploits, altering very much to Theseus' advantage the scene of his return and his father's suicide in Catullus 64. She juxtaposes a fanciful elaboration on the solitary death that awaits her in the very near future (119–24) with Theseus' triumphant homecoming. The returning hero, she imagines, will be asked to tell of his famous exploits, including the story of the slaying of the Minotaur. But, she wonders with trepidation, in his telling of events, will she lose her place? She insists that her part of the deed also be told, and thus she demands the intertwining of their tales—*me quoque narrato sola tellure relictam: / non ego sum titulis subripienda tuis* ("tell also of me abandoned in a deserted land—I must not be subtracted from the list of your accomplishments," 129–30). The force of the imperative *narrato* ("tell") and the obligation or necessity inherent in the passive periphrastic *non sum subripienda* ("I must not be subtracted") indicate the desperate strength of her wish to connect herself for posterity at least to one episode in the story of Theseus.

Dido and Phyllis share with Ariadne a desire for narrative fusion with their departed lovers. They, however, envision an alternative manner to achieve their goal. While Ariadne insists that she be part of the heroic tale of Theseus, Dido and Phyllis seek to intertwine their stories with those of their lovers by inventing epitaphs for themselves. Dido refuses the appellation *Elissa Sychaei* ("Elissa, wife of Sychaeus," 193) on her funeral monument but rather hopes that her tombstone will stand as a testament for all time, managing to bring together in language two characters whom the plot has separated. As her memorial, she chooses: *prae-buit Aeneas et causam mortis et ensem/ ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu* ("Aeneas provided the reason for death and the sword. Dido herself, making use of her own hand to commit the act, perished," 195–96). Similarly, Phyllis composes the distich by which she hopes to join herself forever to Demophoon. Again the letter-writing heroine makes full use of the word order to render more vivid her meaning, creating a verbal incorporation of the hero onto her tombstone as she promises *inscribere*⁵³ *meo causa invidiosa*

sepulchro ("you will be inscribed on my tombstone as the hateful cause of my death," 145). Then further fusing them in style and in meaning she constructs *Phyllida Demophoon leto dedit hospes amantem / ille necis causam praebuilt ipsa manum* ("Demophoon, the guest, drove Phyllis, who loved him, to death. He provided the reason for death; she provided her hand to perform the deed," 147–48). Twice she places them side by side in the first line of her epitaph, while in the second line they balance one another in a neat, syntactical equivalence.⁵⁴ Whom a funeral monument hath joined together let no man pull asunder.

Lacanian theory serves to cast light both on the similarities that emerge between the heroines and on the vital importance to the heroines of maintaining their roles as objects of the heroes' desire. The women seek so stubbornly to retain their places as desired by their absent lovers because of the structure of feminine desire. As we have seen, feminine subjects, by Lacanian definition, come into being in their attempts to transform themselves into that which the other lacks. A woman wishes to be the eternal cause of the other's desire. In a way then, as the hero rejects the heroine, he places her existence *qua* subject in jeopardy, and we have observed precisely this threat of disintegration to Phyllis' sense of being. The heroine's abandonment indicates that she no longer fills the role of that which her lover is missing; she is no longer the object-cause of his desire. But if her sense of existence is predicated on being what the other desires, then it becomes understandable why she clings, despite all reasonable evidence to the contrary, despite her own apprehension of the "realities" of her situation, to the fact that the affair is not over. The recurring allusions or references within the various epistles both to the heroines of other poems in the collection and to prior literary heroines force the reader to consider the somewhat disquieting fact that the *Heroides* present any number of different desiring women in fundamentally similar ways. We shall return to this point, which will be highly significant for a reading of the poems as a whole.

The Ovidian heroines, however, do not merely insist with firm resolution that they remain somehow connected to the heroes who have abandoned them. In a more proactive fashion they also seek out ways in which they might more successfully make themselves over into the cause of the heroes' desire. Following the dictates of feminine desire, the heroines strive to ascertain

what the hero wants so that then they can act out ways of capturing his desire. Simultaneously and irreconcilably the heroines choose to construct themselves as powerful and as helpless. Once again Lacanian theory helps to shed light on this incoherence that underlies the heroines' self-depictions. Indeed, Phyllis, Dido, and Ariadne seem to apprehend one of the ways in which masculine desire works. Lacan observes that the erotic relationship, for masculine subjects, involves, on one level at least, an Imaginary relation of identification with one's partner. A man loves a woman whom he imagines to be, in some sense, like him. Constructing an idealized version of her, he holds her up as a double of himself. But as his "double" she threatens to usurp his place, to throw his sense of self and of his place in the world into confusion; he must, therefore, distinguish himself from her. In each case the woman becomes a projection to reinforce the image the man has of himself. Dido, Phyllis, and Ariadne, alternately performing the roles of powerful and helpless woman, carefully select two self-constructions that will allow them to manipulate the narcissism of masculine desire to their own advantage. If the heroine represents the hero's idealized double, then her power reflects his own. If she is different from him, her helplessness and vulnerability function to bolster his sense of his own potency.

At moments within their tellings, the heroines describe themselves with stunning confidence as powerful and as capable of providing real assistance to the heroes. They highlight both their strength and their independence. In one manifestation, Phyllis constructs herself as a competent sovereign. She appears in her queenly garb, proudly surveying her possessions, her people (88), her realms (89), and her harbors (92), all surrounded by her sea (100). She clearly articulates the idea that Demophoon owes his ability to depart from her shores in a refurbished fleet to her compassion but also to her position as ruler. As queen, she ensured that the repairs of his battered ships took place. She reminds him of her power amid bitter recriminations:

at laceras etiam puppes furiosa refeci,
 ut, qua desererer, firma carina foret.
 remigiumque dedi, quo me fugiturus abires.
 heu, patior telis vulnera facta meis! (45-48)

[But indeed, out of my mind, I refurbished your tattered ships so that the keel by which I was deserted might be sturdy. I gave you the oarage by which you, intent on fleeing, might leave me. Alas, I suffer from wounds made by my own weapons.]

Not only does she represent herself as responsible for his new ships but her power is so great that she attributes her abandonment to her own actions; *she* enables him to leave her.

A second time, two-thirds of the way through her letter, she overtly provides a picture of herself for the benefit of Demophoon in case he has problems identifying the writer of the letter with any certainty. She is worried that perhaps he will wonder: *quae sim Phyllis et unde* ("who I, Phyllis, am, and where I am from," 106). In a statement that asserts the political power she wields, Phyllis proclaims: *Threicios portus hospitiumque dedi* ("I gave you access to the Thracian harbors, and I offered you hospitality," 108). She is the one who offers or denies strangers access to her country's harbors. Moreover, she also underscores her sovereignty within her household. On the one hand, she presents herself as the one who makes the decision about whether or not to grant *hospitium* ("hospitality") to one who seeks it. On the other, she emphasizes the fact that she finds herself in control of significant assets, money, and a kingdom. She recalls that she liberally bestowed her *opes* ("wealth," 109) on Demophoon to increase his prosperity, reveling slightly in her ability to do so—*munera multa dedi, multa datura fui* ("I gave you many gifts; I would have given you still more," 110).

It is perhaps interesting to consider here that an examination of the extant sources that provide the literary backdrop for this epistle indicate that Phyllis' father and not Phyllis was ruler, and that he offered his kingdom to Demophoon as a dowry for his daughter.⁵⁵ Although one must keep in mind that the extant sources for this particular letter are few,⁵⁶ I find it tempting at least to entertain the possibility that the discrepancy between "source texts" and the Ovidian heroine on the matter of her power is quite deliberate. Constructing an image of herself for Demophoon, seeking to portray herself as object-cause of his desire, Phyllis boldly chooses to ignore her father and to depict herself not as merely a princess but instead as a queen in control of

her country and of her own actions.⁵⁷ She paints herself as Demophoon's idealized double; for he too is the son of a king with his own aspirations to rule. In this way, Demophoon, casting Phyllis as his mirror-image, can feel powerful as well.

Dux femina facti ("a woman is the leader of the mighty exploit")—Virgil's words resound in one of the two conflicting self-portraits Dido constructs in *Heroides* 7.⁵⁸ In one strand of autobiographical narrative, she emphatically creates herself as an idealized version of the hero Aeneas. She stresses the fact that she has already successfully accomplished a goal identical to the one that he, driven by fate, pursues for twelve Virgilian books.⁵⁹ She has overcome great obstacles to found a new and dynamic city. In her letter Dido puts forth a story of her strength and courage, a heroic narrative that presents her in a powerful light. After she discovered that her brother had murdered her husband, Sychaeus, and was plotting, in turn, her own murder, she gathered together a group of loyal supporters and led them in flight across the sea. Eluding the potential disasters of the deep as well as the pursuing enemy, they arrived on shore (115–18). There, with the money she had smuggled out of her homeland, rather than with violent warfare, she purchased a piece of land on which to found her new city (118). Indeed, with the prevalence of the first person in the ten lines that make up her telling of events, lines 115–24, she creates the sense of her own competence by emphasizing the fact that *she*, against the odds, achieved not only survival but also success. She had barely begun the construction of Carthage when the surrounding cities, spying an opportunity for territorial acquisition through the annexation of a developing city whose leader is *peregrina et femina* ("a foreigner and a woman," 121), began to wage war against her people. In an understated pentameter, *vixque rudis portas urbis et arma paro* ("I scarcely put up the rudimentary gates of a city and I am taking up arms," 122), Dido makes it clear that her opponents severely underestimated her.⁶⁰ She has successfully completed a destiny that Aeneas finds himself struggling to fulfill, a fact covertly yet constantly present to the intertextual reader; with this self-construction she proffers herself to Aeneas as an idealized version of himself.

Dido further emphasizes her power when she reminds Aeneas how she, the great ruler, saved him—*fluctibus eiectionem tuta statione*

recepi ("I received you with safe anchorage when you had been cast forth from the waves," 89). Immediately she follows the gift of safety and life with another offer, emphasizing the swiftness of her action with the ellipsis of the passage of time, brought out clearly in the terse ablative absolute, *vixque bene audito nomine regna dedi* ("and scarcely having heard your name properly I gave you my kingdom," 90). Not only did she receive him into her city and offer to help repair his sea-worn fleet, she controlled important possessions that she could bestow upon him. Dido has many benefits to confer upon Aeneas—a home, a wife, wealth, and kingship:

hos potius populos in dotem, ambage remissa,
accipe et advectas Pygmalionis opes.
Ilion in Tyriam transfer felicius urbem
resque loco regis sceptraque sacra tene! (149–52)

[Having ceased from your wandering,⁶¹ receive rather these peoples as a dowry and the wealth of Pygmalion that I brought here. Transfer Ilion into the Tyrian city with more good fortune, and now, in the role of king, control the affairs of state and hold the sacred scepter.]

Her potency increases with the significance of the gifts she dangles before a man who seeks, and has long been seeking, exactly what she offers.

Ariadne too understands the importance of a strong self-portrait in her attempts to rekindle Theseus' desire. Recreating a narrative of her life in Crete when she was princess of the realm, she represents herself as a powerful and competent heroine. A woman, *cui pater est Minos, cui mater filia Phoebi* ("whose father is Minos and whose mother is the daughter of Phoebus," 91), related by blood to both gods and kings, she fell in love with a stranger sent to her country in order to expiate the blood guilt of his city. The hero arrives as part of the necessary yearly sacrifice of Athenian youths to the Minotaur. In her telling, Ariadne highlights her role in Theseus' slaying of the half-man half-bull, asserting that the crux of his success lies not in the killing of the creature but rather in the hero's ability thereafter to retrace his steps and to find an exit from the labyrinth. This is possible thanks to her; for, as she reminds him, *tibi, ne victor tecto morerere recurvo, / quae regerent passus, pro duce fila dedi* ("I gave you

threads, in place of a guide, to direct your steps, so that, if you were victorious [over the Minotaur], you might not die in the winding structure," 71–72). Indeed, Ariadne draws attention to her actions, creating anticipation in the separation of *meo* from *facto*, and emphasizing *meo* by its weighty, final position in the line: *et pater et tellus iusto regnata parenti / prodita sunt facto, nomina cara, meo* ("both my father and the land ruled by my just father, dear names, were betrayed by *my* deed," 69–70). She presents herself in a light in which Theseus might ideally like to see himself, possessing the power to procure success and survival.

In an utterly incompatible fashion, however, the heroines set beside these self-portraits of power a second self-depiction that highlights their helplessness and vulnerability.⁶² The second self-representation too, as much as the first, reveals the heroines at work systematically configuring and reconfiguring themselves in an effort to make themselves over into objects of the heroes' desire. Dido remains ruler of her country despite Aeneas' departure. If Phyllis, rather than her father, actually rules Thrace, then she too retains power. Neither woman is deposed or forced to abdicate the throne after her abandonment. If, however, as I have suggested, Phyllis, overstepping her authority, chose to play the role of queen in an attempt to capture Demophoon's desire despite the fact that her father held sway over the kingdom, she now dramatically changes her tune. Both heroines make a decision to emphasize sensations of powerlessness and of (self-imposed) exclusion from their former place within society's structures and institutions. Phyllis considered her relationship with Demophoon a marriage. In his absence, she wonders what happened to the *fides* ("pledge," 31), to the *commissa dextera dextrae* ("right hand entrusted to right hand," 31), and to *promissus Hymenaeus* ("promised Hymenaeus," 33), *qui mihi coniugii sponsor et obses erat* ("who was the surety for, and the pledge of, marriage for me," 34). In her feelings of betrayal, she asks whether perhaps he has found "another wife"—*altera coniunx* (103). In addition, she reminds him that when he left her country with a promise to return, he publicly uttered the admonition; "*Phylli, fac expectes Demophoonta tuum.*" ("Phyllis, see to it that you wait for your Demophoon," 98). He acknowledged their relationship.

And yet, she also methodically offers a representation of herself that insists on her erotic naïveté through which she manages

to highlight her helplessness for Demophoon. No longer claiming to have believed herself a wife, the only social role in which her behavior would have been acceptable, instead now she presents herself to Demophoon as a young girl, extremely susceptible to the sophisticated deceit of a man who longed only to sleep with her. She claims that she was powerless before him, appealing to the congenital weakness of a woman in love when she refers to herself with the designation *et amans et femina* ("a woman, and more, a woman in love," 65); indeed, *virginitas avibus libata sinistris / castaque fallaci zona recincta manu* ("[her] virginity [was] offered when the birds indicated sinister omens and [her] chaste girdle [was] loosened by a deceitful hand," 115-16). Further underscoring her helplessness vis-à-vis Demophoon, she announces: *fallere credentem non est operosa puellam / gloria; simplicitas digna favore fuit* ("To deceive a girl who believes is not a laborious action that brings glory; my inexperience was worthy of your consideration," 63-64). Conjuring up an even more pathetic figure than the stereotypical "woman in love," she creates herself as a *puella* ("girl"), prone to credulity (*credentem*) and suffering from inexperience (*simplicitas*).

Barchiesi astutely notes the Virgilian allusion. Phyllis, when she speaks lines 63-64, reminds us of Virgil's Dido. In a famous scene, Juno castigates Venus and Cupid for kindling Dido's passion, claiming that it is no great feat for two gods to bring a mortal woman utterly to her knees.⁶³ I want to make use of Barchiesi's observation in service of my own argument. In order to bolster her self-construction as defenseless, Phyllis plays "the Dido card," likening herself through allusion to the great Virgilian heroine at a moment that highlights Dido's own extreme vulnerability. As we have already noted,⁶⁴ she overtly recalls Dido yet again when she refers to herself as Demophoon's *hospita* ("hostess"). She uses the designation emphatically as the very opening word in the first line of the poem, employs a similar self-characterization at line 74, the midpoint of the letter, and then closes her composition with a distich in which she calls her former lover a *hospes* ("guest," 147). In this methodical way, she frames her entire epistle with a reference to Virgil's Dido in her manifestation as helpless before Aeneas and the mandates of the gods. In addition, she calls the Virgilian heroine to mind in a direct manner when she reconsiders a ceremonial ritual that united

her with Demophoon. Venus and Juno deceive Virgil's Dido; divine forces re-create the aspects of the wedding ceremony as nymphs shriek, fires flash, and Juno appears at hand in the guise of bridesmaid.⁶⁵ Phyllis turns the Virgilian scene into a nightmarish hallucination caused by the furies. A shrieking Tisiphone must have been her *pronuba* ("bridesmaid," 117) and Allecto also must have been present (119) to hear the ill-omened, mournful tune of a solitary bird (118).⁶⁶ Indeed, the Dido of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, disintegrating erotic victim, remains in the background throughout this letter, as Phyllis seems often to reconstruct her story so that it matches the narrative of the Carthaginian ruler.⁶⁷

Further, if we return to lines 63–64, we note that the Ovidian heroine, through her intertextual reference to Dido, compares Demophoon's role in deceiving poor, vulnerable Phyllis to Venus' and Cupid's similar role in Dido's undoing. If we follow out the comparison, we discover that as Phyllis emphasizes her own helplessness she simultaneously makes Demophoon appear larger-than-life, by analogy, a god. And she repeats this characterization of Demophoon a second time within her letter. Again she also draws out her own vulnerability through a reference to Dido as the queen unravels in *Aeneid* 4. After she has discovered Aeneas' plans to depart from Carthage, Dido denounces him in a rousing speech. Overcome by emotion, she faints and her servants convey her to her bedroom. Phyllis overtly takes on the behavior of Dido to underscore her similar vulnerability and helplessness, depicting a scene in which she herself swoons into the arms of servants. Wandering along the shore staring out to sea, Phyllis watches for the return of Demophoon. Catching sight of ships' sails in the distance, she faints (127ff).⁶⁸ She explains the importance of each docking boat: *et quaecumque procul venientia lintea vidi, / protinus illa meos auguror esse deos* ("and whatever sails I saw coming from afar, straightaway I augur that they are my gods," 125–26). Her hopes and prayers focus on Demophoon, whom she does not overtly name but whom she certainly identifies here with his vessel. By extension, therefore, as she stresses her own vulnerability, she constructs him as her god.⁶⁹

A similar attempt to bring her own powerlessness into focus underlies the heroine's choice to portray herself as on the verge of death. Playing the role of disintegrating victim for Demophoon,

she reveals that her plan is to commit suicide. She announces: *hinc mihi suppositas immittere corpus in undas / mens fuit, et, quoniam fallere pergis, erit* ("I thought about casting my body from here into the waves below, and since you continue to deceive me, so it will be," 133–34). Moreover, she is not content with the mere announcement that she will take her own life. Indeed, she manages to emphasize her self-depiction as vulnerable, morbidly and elaborately detailing the ways in which her body is assailable. She has a thirst for poison; self-immolation with a sword and hanging arouse sensations of pleasure (139–41).⁷⁰ She insists: *in necis electu parva futura mora est* ("The delay in the choice of the means of death will be slight," 144). She imagines a scene in which Demophoon gathers up her bones after she dies, offering him in the process an image of her helpless body floating to his shores (135–36). Phyllis conjures up her suicide as a means to highlight not only her own helplessness but also the hero's power. She composes an epitaph that will read: *Phyllida Demophoon leto dedit hospes amantem / ille necis causam praebuit ipsa manus* ("Demophoon, the guest, drove Phyllis, who loved him, to death. He provided the reason for death; she provided her hand to perform the deed," 147–48). She allots to him the role of subject (*Demophoon, hospes*) while referring to herself in the accusative or object case (*Phyllida, amantem*); she gives him control over her act of suicide.

Dido's epistle also features an about-face in the heroine's self-definition.⁷¹ She too seeks to undercut the strength and leadership ability that she emphasized when she recounted how she escaped her brother's plot to murder her and how she succeeded in founding her new city. Whereas earlier she focused Aeneas' attention on her power to fend off military threats from neighboring kingdoms, now she portrays herself as utterly powerless before the very same enemies. Frantically, as if she could not even dream of mounting a defense, she asks: *quid dubitas vinctam Gaetulo tradere Iarbae?* ("Why do you hesitate to hand me over bound to Gaetulian Iarbas?" 125). In addition, she conjures up danger from her brother who might still hunt her down and slaughter her (127–28). She now silently passes over the fact that before she met Aeneas she acquitted herself admirably in the face of identical perils.

Like Phyllis, Dido also conjures herself up for Aeneas as impotent, a role she chooses because, as Phyllis did before her, she calculates her helplessness will render her desirable in the eyes of the hero; for her vulnerability serves to demonstrate his own power to the hero. Despite earlier claims that she chose to form an alliance of marriage with Aeneas and hand over the scepter of power to him (118 and 123–24), Dido insists that with Aeneas' departure she will not take control of her city once again as its queen. Instead she proposes to Aeneas that there exist two options for her, each one designed to prove that she is in a helpless and vulnerable position. On the one hand, she professes herself so desperate to convince him to stay in Carthage that she will relinquish her position as his wife and suffer the social reprobation that would accompany such a change. She is fully prepared to play whatever subordinate role he wants. She emphasizes simultaneously both the performative aspect of her self-construction and her own self-presentation as lacking in power with the use of the passive voice, *si pudet uxoris, non nupta, sed hospita dicar* ("If you are ashamed to have me as your wife, let me be called not wife but hostess," 167). Underscoring her own weakness by echoing Phyllis' most helpless self-construction as a cross between naïve young girl and Virgilian Dido, the Ovidian Dido too announces that she feels prepared to be called *hospita* ("hostess"), provided that the hero remain with her. On the other hand, she suggests that in the second possible outcome she will return to the extremely powerless status of an exile (111ff). Further recalling Phyllis, Dido emphasizes her vulnerability with the recurring threat that she is on the verge of suicide. She chooses to begin her epistle with an image of imminent death, *sic ubi fata vocant, . . . / . . . concinit albus olor* ("thus, when the fates call . . . the white swan sings," 1–2). She announces that she can hear the marble statue of her dead husband, Sychaeus, beckoning her to join him in the Underworld (99ff). And if Aeneas remains intent on departure, she firmly states, *est animus nobis effundere vitam* ("I have decided to pour forth my life," 181).

Dido's choice to highlight her helplessness for Aeneas equally importantly serves to present the hero with a sense of his own power. On the death of her first husband Dido made a vow to his ashes that she would remain eternally faithful to him. Taking

Aeneas as her lover, she broke her vow. Conjuring up the scene for Aeneas, she begs her late husband to forgive her "offense" (*culpa*, 105). She accentuates her own weakness; she did not possess the fortitude required to keep her promise. And yet, she simultaneously declares Aeneas' greatness. Her former husband should find no difficulty in forgiving her for breaking her vow of chastity. She asserts that *decepit idoneus auctor*; / *invidiam noxae detrahit ille meae* ("he who caused my beguiling was deserving; he takes away the *odium* from my fault," 105-6). Sychaeus, as Dido represents it to Aeneas, must find her beyond rebuke not because the act she committed was without fault, but because she committed this act with Aeneas whom she depicts as *idoneus auctor*.

Aeneas' departure gives her another excuse to parade not only her vulnerability but also his power. Two distichs serve the dual purpose both of accentuating how ineffectual she is in coming to terms with Aeneas' leaving, and of underscoring for the hero the power he holds over her:

ille quidem male gratus et ad mea munera surdus,
et quo, si non sim stulta, carere velim;
non tamen Aenean, quamvis male cogitat, odi,
sed queror infidum quæstaque peius amo. (27-30)

[Indeed he is ungrateful and deaf to my gifts, and I would wish to be without him if I were not foolish. However, I do not hate Aeneas, although he devises wicked plans, but instead I complain that he is unfaithful. And once I have complained, I love more terribly.]

While Aeneas can leave her behind, Dido insists that for him there can be no substitute in her heart. *Aeneas oculis vigilantis semper inhaeret*, / *Aenean animo nox diesque refert* ("Aeneas always appears to my eyes as I lie awake; night and day recall Aeneas to my mind," 25-26), she proclaims. Some editors question the manuscripts' reading of *nox diesque* ("night and day"), choosing rather the emendation *nox quiesque*, a hendiadys translated as "the stillness of night."⁷² The reading in the manuscripts, however, captures well Dido's attempts to assert Aeneas' all-encompassing importance to her; she thinks of him around the clock, day and night. In addition, she hypothesizes that she is perhaps carrying his child in her womb (133ff). Again she highlights her weakness, threatening to take her own life as well as

the life of her unborn child. And yet, once again, her emphasis on her vulnerability functions to point to the importance of Aeneas. On the one hand, she implies that life without Aeneas is not worth living. On the other, she explicitly defines the child for Aeneas as *pars tui* ("a part of you," 134), presenting herself to the hero as carrier of his child. Her strategy is clear; he should want to spare the wretched mother's life not because he finds her life valuable in any way, but rather for the sake of his offspring, significant only because it is a part of Aeneas.⁷³

Ariadne also represents herself as hovering at death's door and thus highlights her incredible vulnerability. With a gusto unprecedented in the *Heroides*, Ariadne considers herself as if dead and vividly conjures up the ways in which she might actually die. At the very moment she spies Theseus' ship's sails retreating on the horizon, Ariadne describes herself as *frigidior glacie semi-animisque* ("colder than ice and half-dead," 32). This deathlike coldness returns in the imagery she employs for herself twenty lines later when she uses the adjective *frigida* ("cold," 49) to evoke her state. She further develops her thought with the more expressive, if jarringly literal, *quamque lapis sedes, tam lapis ipsa fui* ("as my seat was stone, so I myself was stone," 50).⁷⁴ More overtly, she defines herself as *femina periuri fraude sepulta viri* ("a woman buried by the deceit of a perjured man," 76). With a morbid fascination she invents countless possible ways in which she might finally die abandoned on the island, all the while highlighting the vulnerable position in which she finds herself. She asserts: *occurrunt animo pereundi mille figurae* ("a thousand ways to die rush into my head," 81), and then proceeds to draw out at length all of the options. Wild beasts, divided into separate murderous categories (wolves, lions, tigers, seals [83–88]), men (88 and 97–98), and *simulacra deorum* ("images of the gods," 95) offer her multiple potential forms of demise.⁷⁵ She pictures with horror her funeral, at which no mother closes her eyes, no friendly hand washes and anoints her body, and birds of prey feed upon her corpse (119ff). Alternatively, she imagines a remorseful Theseus returning to Dia to find her dead and to gather up her lifeless corpse (149–50).

Moreover, Ariadne, determining that one of the roles she must play to inflame Theseus' passion is that of helpless woman, goes well beyond the other heroines, at times veering in her

performance somewhat dangerously toward excessive hyperbole.⁷⁶ Carefully she depicts herself as a most pitiful creature. Ariadne describes in great and melodramatic detail her multiple visits to the bed that the two of them shared. She constructs for him a vivid depiction of herself returning again and again to their couch, considering it *perfidus* ("treacherous," 58) but also, as the place where she and Theseus were joined (51), her sole remaining friend and confidante. Covering the bed with tears, she pleads with it to bring back her beloved. She attempts to convey her feeling of urgency and despair: '*Pressimus, exclamo, 'te duo: redde duos'*' ("We two pressed you down; give back the two of us," I exclaim," 56). When Theseus has gone, she claims that she continues to find something of his presence in the bed. In the covers she finds the traces and the warmth of his body, asserting *et tua, quae possum, pro te vestigia tango / strataque quae membris intepuere tuis* ("I touch the imprints you left in place of you—all that I can touch—and the coverings that were warmed by your limbs," 53–54). Pressing her body against the imprints left behind by his, she attempts to forge an impossible union.⁷⁷ Or at least she would have Theseus believe that such is the extent of her vulnerability.

Like Dido, Ariadne also explicitly constructs herself as a disenfranchised *exul* ("exile," 66). In point of fact, she actually has been removed from her homeland and left behind on an island. Once a princess of a great land ruled by her powerful father, clever and resourceful enough to save Theseus from the Minotaur, she now considers herself helpless, at an absolute loss. She does not even attempt to contrive a plan of escape. Rather, in gloomy terms, she describes the island with an obsessive focus on its isolation. There is no cultivation, no trace of man or beast. Cut off from land on all sides by water, still the island receives visit from neither sailors nor ships (59–62). She is alone, powerless. And yet, she hints only thirty lines later that perhaps the desertion of the island is not quite as complete as she pictures in her morbid imagination, tipping her hand with *sive colunt habitantque viri* ("if men cultivate the land and live here," 97), as well as with *quid vetat et gladios per latus ire meum?* ("what prohibits swords from piercing my side?" 88). Further, she yields at least the possibility of escape, stating that if by some chance she were able to leave the island, there would be nowhere for her to go since *accessus terra paterna negat* ("my fatherland denies me access," 64).⁷⁸ While

she remains perhaps correct in assessing her situation, the reader cannot help but notice the shift in her attitude toward herself and toward Theseus. As Ariadne draws herself in terms of utter helplessness and vulnerability, she simultaneously insists that she sees potential succor at the hands of Theseus alone. Going one step farther she even refers to him as *pars maior* ("the greater part," 58) of herself.

One more time she reveals that, although she portrays herself as a helpless woman on a deserted island, she may be putting a somewhat exaggerated spin on the picture for effect. Considering the possibility of being captured and set to work as a slave, she again somewhat undermines the image of the island's complete isolation; for if she were to be enslaved, she would necessarily have to come into contact with other human beings. Further highlighting both her own weakness and Theseus' importance, Ariadne reveals that she holds herself above spinning wool, the traditional occupation of a slave, but not because she sees herself as too noble on her own terms. Indeed, all the reasons that she should not abase herself through servitude involve her relationships to powerful people. Because her father is a strong ruler, because her mother counts Phoebus among her ancestors (90–91), Ariadne feels that she can refuse to become a slave. She figures that her betrothal to Theseus, however, should carry even more weight than the status of her parents in setting her beyond slavery. Insisting, *quodque magis memini, quae tibi pacta fui* ("and what I remember more—I was betrothed to you," 92), she attributes to him the enormous power of being the one who will ward off from her all potential ill.

Again attempting to demonstrate for Theseus her helplessness and thus simultaneously his power, Ariadne chooses, as a principal strategy, to manipulate the medium of sight. Feminist and deconstructionist theory of the gaze divides looking into two positions of unequal power—the commanding subject who views, and the object who is viewed.⁷⁹ Ariadne exploits this hierarchical dichotomy, establishing a visual image of herself before Theseus' mind's eye. Meticulously she constructs Theseus as the active, all-controlling looker, almost literally laying herself bare, a vulnerable object of his gaze, characterizing herself rather strikingly with verbs in the passive voice.⁸⁰ In a disconcerting manner, underscoring her self-constructed powerlessness, she reduces

herself to a composite sketch of her various body parts, vividly describing each one so that she presents herself as an object for Theseus' visual pleasure.⁸¹

With sharp detail, she describes the scene of her awakening on the beach to find herself abandoned. First, still *languida* ("languid," 9), she reaches her hands across the bed in order to touch Theseus (10). Failing to find him, she moves her hands across the couch a second time (11). Again coming up empty, she begins to use her *bracchia* ("arms," 12). Now wide awake in horror, *membraque sunt viduo praecipitata toro* ("my limbs were cast headlong out of the widowed couch," 14). Still attempting to create for Theseus a complete and vivid picture of herself, she turns now to her reactions when she realized that Theseus had abandoned her. Locating her responses in various erotic zones of her body (her breasts, and especially, as we shall see, her hair),⁸² she asserts: *protinus adductis sonuerunt pectora palmis / utque erat e somno turbida, rupta coma est* ("straightaway my breast sounded forth as I pounded upon it with my palms, and I tore my hair, messy as it was after sleep," 15–16). This voluntary and self-imposed objectification for Theseus' viewing pleasure continues when she explains to the departed hero how, in her initial search for him, her *oculi* ("eyes," 18) saw nothing, and how she conducted her search up and down the beach only with difficulty since *alta puellares tardat harena pedes* ("the deep sand slows down girlish feet," 20).⁸³ At the end of her epistle Ariadne returns her concentration to her hands and her breast. Once more she conjures up for her reader a vivid image, *has tibi plangendo lugubria pectora lassas / infelix tendo trans freta longa manus* ("wretched I stretch out to you across the wide sea these hands tired out from beating my sorrowful breast," 145–46), rendered more striking by the contrived distance between *has* and *manus* mimicking the action of stretching her hands across the sea. In fact, she even demands that he call to mind her trembling *corpus* ("body," 139).

More than on any other part of her body, Ariadne dwells upon her hair, four times calling the attention of the hero to rest on her golden locks. It should come as no surprise that the heroine chooses to focus most clearly upon the attribute for which she is most famous.⁸⁴ The Ovidian heroine seems well-apprieved of what others see as the pinnacle of her beauty and appears prepared to make use of that feature to her fullest advantage with

Theseus. First, she describes her hair as it looks when she rises from sleep, indicating to the hero how she behaved in her bereavement upon discovering him gone from bed on the morning he abandoned her—*utque erat e somno turbida, rupta coma est* ("I tore my hair, messy as it was after sleep," 16). The second time she makes reference to her hair, Ariadne draws an elaborate portrait of herself for Theseus, likening herself to a maenad touched by the god's madness. She asserts: *aut ego diffusis erravi sola capillis, / qualis ab Ogygio concita Baccha deo* ("or alone I wandered about with unkempt hair, just as a bacchant aroused by the Ogygian god," 47-48), emphasizing the streaming and disordered appearance of her hair through the double description, the overt *diffusis* and the subtler evocation of the bacchant's traditionally unkempt mane. In the same vein, she demands that Theseus look at *demissos lugentis more capillos* ("[her] hair let down in the manner of one grieving," 137), her hair again uncombed, long, falling into her face. Finally, at the conclusion of her letter, she brings back before his eyes the image of her hair, this time insisting that she holds out to him the hairs *qui superant* ("that remain," 147), implying that in her grief she has perhaps slightly marred her most noted feature.

Ariadne leaves no doubt as to the reason for displaying to Theseus these images of her beautiful hair, as well as of her various, other (attractive) body parts. By offering herself to Theseus as an enticing object of his gaze, she finds yet one more way to construct herself as powerless and to depict the hero to himself as powerful. She understands the narcissistic aspect of masculine desire. Believing that in part what a man wants is a partner who can reflect him back to himself as potent, Ariadne performs the requisite helplessness and vulnerability, in the process subtly and unobtrusively attributing power to him. Establishing herself as a collection of well-appointed body parts over which he exerts the power of the gaze and from which he might derive visual pleasure, she seeks to be the cause of his desire—*di facerent ut me summa de puppe videres! / movisset vultus maesta figura tuos* ("I wish the gods had caused you to look upon me from high on the stern! My sad figure would have moved your features," 133-34). If only he could have caught a glimpse of her as he sailed away, an overwhelming feeling of desire would have compelled him to come back to her. Since he can no longer actually glance upon her,

however, Ariadne seeks to allow him to achieve the same sense of being the powerful wielder of the gaze by conjuring up a visual image of herself. She asserts: *nunc quoque non oculis, sed, quae potes, aspice mente* ("now look, not with your eyes, but with your mind, with which you still can look," 135).⁸⁵ She can describe herself and thus aid in stimulating his imagination—but as to whether he will choose to look either with his *oculi* ("eyes") or with his *mens* ("mind"), she grants ultimate control to him alone.⁸⁶

So far we have considered the Ovidian heroines, Phyllis, Dido, and Ariadne, whose double self-representations become less confusing when seen through a Lacanian lens. Lacanian notions about woman's desire to be the cause of the other's desire serve to explicate the inconsistencies in characterization for which critics often level complaints against the epistolary collection. Striving to be the object that sets the hero's desire in motion, the heroines perform roles they think will do just that. Apprehending the narcissistic tendencies of masculine desire—the attraction of a partner who functions to reflect the hero's power back to him—each heroine uses this understanding as she chooses two roles that are likely to stimulate his desire. Accordingly, Phyllis, Dido, and Ariadne manipulate their self-representations, offering themselves as alternatively strong and helpless, yet in each incarnation subtly creating for the hero an image of his own power. Let us turn now to two other heroines, Medea and Hypsipyle, who similarly opt for a two-fold self-portrait, but who make use of the Lacanian idea of identification differently as they strive to depict themselves. While Phyllis, Dido, and Ariadne take their cues for self-construction from the way identification works in masculine desire, Medea's and Hypsipyle's identification operates as it does in feminine desire. These two heroines, in a manner that, on the surface, may seem somewhat surprising, produce irreconcilable dichotomies because of their imaginary (i.e., in the Lacanian Imaginary) identification with another woman (or other women).

MIRROR, MIRROR ON JASON'S WALL: *HEROIDES* 6 AND 12

The two strikingly similar letters to Jason composed by the very dissimilar heroines he has abandoned during his quest for the golden fleece reiterate the now familiar pattern: a yearning to be

the cause of the other's desire and a willingness for that purpose to exploit a strategy of double self-representation. While Dido, Ariadne, and Phyllis, attempting to capture the heroes' desire, act out roles dictated by an understanding of the narcissistic aspects of masculine desire, on the surface Medea and Hypsipyle offer a somewhat different look at the self-characterization feminine desire drives a woman to assume. In a manner illuminated by Lacanian ideas about identification and the aggression/adoration one feels for one's mirror-image, both heroines seek simultaneously to liken themselves to, and to distinguish themselves from, an "actual" woman with specific characteristics—or, at least, with the heroine's imagined (if not fantasized) representation of this woman. And the choice of "actual" woman is not a random one; for both Medea and Hypsipyle, Jason's current or past (or both) love interests play a central role in the heroine's self-constructions. Although Medea and Hypsipyle, unlike Dido, Phyllis, and Ariadne, create self-portraits by focusing their attention on the hero's "other women," on closer consideration the strategies of double self-representation for all five heroines reveal at their core a basic and striking similarity. The heroine manipulates and alters the images she creates of herself, taking on roles as she attempts to become the object-cause of the hero's desire. And yet, for each woman, the performances, stripped down to their essentials, are limited to only two; each woman accentuates, on the one hand, her power, and, on the other, her helplessness born from her unwavering devotion to her lover.

Both Medea and Hypsipyle write to the hero after he has deserted them for the sake of another woman, or rather after he has chosen a more pleasing or at least more convenient object for his own desire. Expressing anger, jealousy, and fear that in some sense her self cannot exist should the hero not affirm that he chooses her as his desired object, each heroine portrays herself to Jason in a disjunctive fashion. Two competing portraits emerge in each letter. In her analysis of these two heroines, a chapter entitled "Jason's Two Medeas,"⁸⁷ Florence Verducci highlights the problematic self-representations of both Medea and Hypsipyle. Hypsipyle, Verducci contends, tries to portray herself to Jason as a gentle, loving wife. Over the course of her letter, however, through her imaginings of her rival Medea in the guise of barbarian sorceress, Hypsipyle, swept away by her crazed jealousy,

reveals that her attempt to construct herself as virtuous is no more than posture. In fact, Hypsipyle's true self shines through; ultimately "it is she, and not Medea, who is the true Medea of Ovid's collection."⁸⁸ Similarly, Medea's letter, according to Verducci, exposes the heroine's attempts to mask her real personality. She tries to present herself as a woman so engulfed by her love that she commits horrendous crimes that seem somehow justifiable in a universe where the law of passion rules supreme. Her efforts, however, come up short as she alludes to the horrifying future act to which her feelings for Jason will drive her. As Medea mentions in veiled fashion her plan to slaughter her sons, the reader recognizes the true Medea and realizes "how near to a monstrous pathos [she (the reader)] ha[s] strayed."⁸⁹

My own reading of *Heroides* 6 and 12 is greatly indebted to Verducci's discussion. I too locate the key to reading these poems in the sharply double self-image each heroine promotes. Like Verducci, I see in Hypsipyle's self-representation a reflection of Medea, more precisely the Medea of Hypsipyle's feverish imagination. And yet, although I follow Verducci in these important respects, my interpretation contains some crucial differences that lead me to altogether different conclusions. First, I read Medea's attempts at self-portrayal as an explicit mirror image of Hypsipyle's similar attempts. While Verducci does note Medea's twofold self-characterization, I take this one step farther to suggest that the Ovidian Medea, like Hypsipyle before her, creates herself, in one manifestation, according to an image she has of Hypsipyle, the woman Jason abandoned for her, as well as according to an image of Creusa, the woman for whom Jason has, in turn, abandoned Medea. Moreover, Verducci's analysis argues that the disjunction within the self-portraits of Medea and Hypsipyle ultimately fades away; on careful inspection, she claims, there is no lack of coherence in these characters. The potential disunity surfaces only when the heroine manages, for a brief time, to cover over her "real self" and offer a fictional self-representation. In the end, Verducci argues, the poses disintegrate, and the letter, despite the heroine, reveals the *true character* of the writer.⁹⁰ On the contrary, I suggest that it is not possible to speak about the letters as marks of the heroines' "true" characters. Instead, both attempts at self-representation, as a character fashioned to stand in stark contrast to her rival and conversely

as a figure dressed up in the characteristics of her rival, reveal themselves as constructions. Moreover, the heroine's self-representation as distinct from her rival frequently coincides with the heroine's characterization in prior "source texts." The coincidence in characterization between "source text" and Ovidian epistle, I believe, is what leads critics to posit a "real" or "true" version of the heroine with the result that she appears both as "herself" and as a performer, or worse, as an imposter. My interpretation, however, suggests that both self-portraits represent performances. Each heroine imagines herself doubly, and in a conflicting manner, as she seeks to render herself more alluring to the hero.

Heroides 6 and 12 allow us to explore how identification might work within feminine desire according to Lacan's framework. As we have observed,⁹¹ the feminine subject, seeking to make herself desirable, can align her desires with those of her partner. As if putting herself in his place and desiring as he does, she considers what causes him to desire and reconstructs herself in the guise of that cause. In other words, Imaginary identification, in feminine desire, occurs at the level of object-cause of desire. Both Hypsipyle and Medea, considering what causes Jason to desire, come face to face with the realization that Jason has abandoned them both for new lovers, and, in Medea's case, has also loved another woman before her. The heroines, therefore, seek identification with Jason's current, or past, lover. Further, Imaginary identification, as we have already seen, leads to two distinct, antithetical responses to the person with whom one identifies. Not only do Medea and Hypsipyle seek to construct themselves so as to resemble the other woman (women) who has caught Jason's eye, but conversely and simultaneously they seek to underline their profound differences from the very same woman (women). This is not to say that Jason (or the masculine subject) becomes unimportant in the scheme of feminine desire, as Verducci and others have argued.⁹² On the contrary, the heroine offers a self-reconstruction that unveils similarities to, as well as sharp divergences from, the image of another woman because she believes that it serves to enhance her own desirability in the hero's eyes. The absent Jason remains powerful through the woman's urgent need for his recognition of her status; he alone can guarantee her identity as object-cause of his desire.

The understanding that Jason has chosen a new consort propels Hypsipyle to draft her epistle. A visitor from Jason's native Thessaly informs her about the hero's successful completion of the tasks set for him by king Aeetes in his attempt to hinder the hero from obtaining the golden fleece. She also learns about Medea; unwittingly, in his account of the hero's actions, the Thessalian reveals Hypsipyle's betrayal at Jason's hands (39-40). Hypsipyle remembers that when he arrived at the shores of her kingdom, she welcomed Jason into her home and into her bed. Contrary to other versions of her story,⁹³ Hypsipyle insists that he pledged himself to her in marriage, speaking of "promised faith" (*pacta fides*, 41) and "conjugal bonds" (*conubialia iura*, 41), as well as asserting *non ego sum furto tibi cognita; pronuba Iuno / adfuit et sertis tempora vinctus Hymen* ("I was not known to you in secret; Juno was present as a bridesmaid and Hymen too, his temples encircled with garlands," 43-44). She reveals her longing to reinstate herself as Jason's consort. With statements like *obsequium, maneo si tua, grande tuli* ("if I remain yours, I have experienced great indulgence at your hands," 18) and *sim reducis coniunx, sicut euntis eram* ("may I be your wife when you return as I was your wife when you left," 112), she demonstrates, both in the nature of her request, and in the optative tone of the statement, the urgency of her craving to be the one Jason desires. And yet, while ostensibly her missive serves as an active attempt to portray herself in such a way as to refocus Jason's attention and desire upon her, more striking to the reader are Hypsipyle's vivid, detailed and seemingly well-researched descriptions of her rival, the woman for whom Jason has deserted her.⁹⁴ Indeed, Medea is at the center of *Heroides* 6, simultaneously the paradigm for all Hypsipyle defines herself against, yet also, paradoxically, all she aspires to become.

Quite consciously Medea becomes the focal point of Hypsipyle's double self-representation. In her attempt to define herself for Jason, Hypsipyle lingers in a detailed fashion over Medea, first repudiating, and then clothing herself in, the characteristics that she attributes to the Colchian woman. Hypsipyle struggles to portray herself on the one hand as quite different from her rival, as a loving, gentle wife whose devotion renders her a helpless woman. On the other, she imagines herself as a ruthlessly powerful creature, similar to Medea, Jason's current object of

desire. Although Hypsipyle and Medea appear, in the "source texts" at least, to possess quite distinct personalities, Jason has loved one and now desires the other. Hypsipyle, as feminine subject, apprehends this fact; focusing steadily on what causes Jason to desire, she enters into a relationship of identification with the object-cause she discovers. Again, through a Lacanian lens, this two-fold representation begins to make sense.

The portrait of Medea that Hypsipyle conjures up strikingly lingers over the Colchian woman's stunning, evil power. A *barbara venefica* ("foreign poisoner," 19) in her first appearance in the poem, later a *barbara paelex* ("foreign concubine," 81), Medea emerges from Hypsipyle's description as an emphatically foreign creature, whose powers as sorceress lead her to transgress the boundaries of proper human behavior. A witch, she exerts strange powers over nature; she has in her repertoire the capacity to alter the course of the sun, the moon, and rivers, and she is magically endowed with the power to move rocks and trees (85–88). Indeed, as she holds sway over the animals, able to charm the bulls of Mars and the vigilant snake, so she must be able to enchant Jason (97–98). With a streak of macabre pleasure, Hypsipyle heightens the horror of the portrait. Not only does Medea possess *carmina* ("spells," 83) but she practices malicious voodoo against unsuspecting folk, using curses and *simulacra cerea* ("waxen images," 91). With a series of vivid images, Hypsipyle fashions Medea into a sorceress who dabbles in necromancy, conceiving of her rival as one who *per tumulos errat passis distincta capillis / certaue de tepidis colligit ossa rogis* ("with unkempt hair wanders ungirded among graves and collects particular bones from pyres that are still warm," 89–90). All readers of the poem notice the vilification of Medea.⁹⁵ I suggest, however, that Hypsipyle's characterization of Medea is more than just slander.

Hypsipyle rather pointedly represents her own character, at first at least, in sharp contrast to the portrait she carefully constructs of the ruthlessly powerful, "barbarian" Medea. Indeed, through the greatest part of the letter, Medea lurks as the polar opposite to every aspect of Hypsipyle's self-characterization. This observation is at the heart of Verducci's interpretation of *Heroides* 6. A closer look at the Ovidian text, however, reveals that Hypsipyle, contrary to prevailing critical opinion, seeks more than self-satisfaction from the rhetorically constructed distance

between Medea and herself. Hypsipyle feels aggression and rivalry toward the woman with whom she identifies, and struggles thus to differentiate herself. In a strongly created juxtaposition, Hypsipyle yokes the two of them together for two and a half couplets, demonstrating clearly the vast dissimilarities in their beliefs about what constitutes proper behavior:

turpiter illa virum cognovit adultera virgo;
 me tibi teque mihi taeda pudica dedit.
 prodidit illa patrem; rapui de caede Thoanta.
 deseruit Colchos; me mea Lemnos habet.
 quid refert, scelerata piam si vincit . . . ? (133-37)

[Disgracefully that adulterous maiden knew my husband. A chaste torch gave me to you and you to me. She betrayed her father; I rescued Thoas from the slaughter. She deserted the Colchians; my Lemnos holds me. But what does it matter if an evil woman bests a pious one . . . ?]

She considers her conduct *pudica* ("chaste") and doubly compounds Medea's disgraceful actions, first by the startling oxymoron *adultera virgo* ("adulterous maiden"), and then by the interlocking of the pronouns *me tibi teque mihi* to underscore the fact that she and Jason belong together as they were lawfully joined. In the striking couplet 135-36, the division of each line into Medea's forceful yet criminal comportment, strongly and morally contrasted to Hypsipyle's upstanding, ethical action, emphatically outlines the distinction the heroine draws between herself and the woman for whom Jason abandoned her. While the women of Lemnos murdered all the men of the island, an event that she explicitly condemns (139), Hypsipyle alone refused to butcher her own father. By contrast Medea, behaving *turpiter* ("disgracefully," 133), has already massacred her brother, betrayed her father (135), and left behind all that belonged to her family (136). On the one hand, Hypsipyle emphasizes her unwillingness and her inability to undertake comparable action. On the other, she underscores her helplessness; for lacking the ruthless potency of Medea she remains powerless to hold on to Jason.

As Hypsipyle carefully selects and parades her various attributes before Jason, Medea lurks always as the starkly contrasting figure. Hypsipyle stresses the factors that increase her worth: her

lineage, that she traces back to Ariadne and Bacchus (113ff),⁹⁶ her homeland, which she offers Jason as a dowry, and her twin sons. Medea cannot similarly boast of her family tree and kingdom as benefits she can bestow upon her husband. In addition, the intertextual reader who knows the future actions of Medea in Corinth sees a second, striking point of comparison that Hypsipyle draws between the two heroines. Hypsipyle chooses her words to convey strong feelings of maternal love. Hypsipyle claims to Jason that after she realized that he had abandoned her, she considered sending her twin sons to their father as legates charged to remind him of the bond that ties mother and father together. She imagined how persuasively they might plead her case, but she dismissed her plan even though she trusted in its potentially fruitful outcome. She explains her actions with the suggestive *sed tenuit coeptas saeva noverca vias* ("but a savage stepmother held back the plans that I had undertaken," 126). Indeed, *Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus* ("the hands of Medea are fitted to every crime," 128). Drawing attention to her fear about the possible murderous actions of Medea, Hypsipyle presents herself to Jason as a paradigm of maternal love. In the process she also imagines herself as helpless to do what she believes might bring Jason back to her, deciding to sacrifice her own chance at happiness for the sake of her sons' safety. Pointedly she inquires: *spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros / corpora, pignoribus parceret illa meis* ("would she who was capable of scattering the mangled body of her brother on the sea spare my pledges?" 129–30)? Hauntingly the word order underscores the image of scattered body parts, as *fratris*, *lacerata*, and *corpora* are sprinkled one by one through the couplet. The reader cannot help but hear a contrast between the heroines when she considers the future actions of Medea, who will sacrifice the lives of her two sons in order to obtain her harsh revenge on Jason.⁹⁷

Hypsipyle also makes her contrast with Medea more explicit and more pointed. She remarks to Jason: *male quaeritur herbis / moribus et forma conciliandus amor* ("love that ought to be gained by character and beauty is wrongly sought by drugs," 93–94). She offers Jason detailed descriptions of recent events in her palace to underscore the sort of character she, unlike Medea, possesses, the sort of character that should win over a man's desire. As opposed to Medea the sorceress, who is neither loving nor

trustworthy, Hypsipyle imagines herself as a model of devotion to her husband. She constructs for Jason an account of how she learned about his exploits in Colchis. A Thessalian *hospes* ("guest") enters her home. So consumed is she by thoughts of her husband that the foreigner "scarcely" (*vix*, 24) crosses her threshold when she greets him with a query about Jason. In his momentary silence, brought on, presumably, by his unwillingness to be the bearer of the news that will devastate her, she becomes agitated, frantically demanding '*vivit? an . . . me quoque fata vocant?*' ("Is he alive? Or do the fates call me also?" 28). If Jason is dead, then Hypsipyle claims that she too must die since she considers an existence without Jason unbearable. In this instance, drawing attention to her devotion has the added advantage of also revealing her helplessness and vulnerability, which, as we have seen, are hallmarks of the *Heroides*' heroines. Continuing to highlight her devotion through her reconstruction of her encounter with the Thessalian, she asserts that as soon as the foreigner assured her that Jason lives, she asked for a recitation of Jason's heroic deeds. Indeed, her retelling of his Colchian trials is so striking that it draws comments from all critics. Hypsipyle narrates the stories about the wild, fire-breathing bulls brought under the yoke, about the harvest of warriors who die in internecine slaughter, and about the defeat of the ever-vigilant snake, who guarded the golden fleece, all with an emphasis on the heroic actions of Jason (9–14). Much to the hero's advantage any reference to Medea and to the assistance she brought him remains pointedly absent. Medea's own reconstruction of the same events (*Heroides* 12.13–20 and 101–8) will have a much different focus, underlining her own central role in his success.⁹⁸ By contrast, Hypsipyle portrays herself as devoted to Jason, a firm believer in his heroism, eager to celebrate his glory.

Further accentuating her devotion and her helplessness, Hypsipyle describes her distraught state at Jason's departure to pursue his quest for the golden fleece by evoking the helpless demeanors of arguably the two gentlest, most devoted, and loving abandoned heroines in Ovid's epistolary collection at moments when they seem especially powerless. She rehearses her tears, her final goodbyes, and her extended longing looks over the wide expanse of the sea, recalling the deserted Ariadne climbing the cliffs to follow Theseus' departing sails with her eyes,⁹⁹ or

Laodamia craning to keep her husband's ship in view as long as she can.¹⁰⁰ From a tower Hypsipyle watches the Argo until she can no longer convince herself that she sees its vanishing outlines. As she explains: *per lacrimas specto, cupidaeque faventia menti / longius assueto lumina nostra vident* ("I look out through my tears and my eyes, favoring my eager mind, see farther than usual," 71-72). Once she has accepted the physical fact of his departure and her eyes no longer serve to construct images of a false presence for her, she strives to keep him present and linked to herself by supplicating the gods with pointedly "chaste prayers" (*preces castas*, 73)—quite different from Medea's witchcraft—for his success and safety.

Hypsipyle, however, offers a second, diametrically opposed strand of self-representation. At the end of the poem she desperately attempts to portray herself as ruthlessly powerful, in the likeness of Medea as she herself has constructed the Colchian woman throughout the poem. In her struggle to render herself desirable to Jason, Hypsipyle opts for a new self-representation, still with an eye to specific erotic choices that Jason has made. If Medea is now the object of Jason's desire, then Medea is what Hypsipyle will become. Indeed, the concluding lines of the letter make use of verbs in moods other than the indicative, suggesting that Hypsipyle's final verses do not unmask underlying, and rather disagreeable, personality traits that ultimately serve to deconstruct the self-portrait that the heroine has so carefully tried to create throughout the rest of the poem. The subjunctive and the imperative moods mark that she does not speak fact, but rather that she utters contra-factual and hypothetical statements as well as wishes possible and impossible for future time. Through wishes and hypotheses, Hypsipyle can construct an image of herself that mirrors her vision of the woman Jason has just chosen as the new object of his desire. Most striking for the reader is Hypsipyle's willingness to construct her self-representations only through a complex relationship of identification with another woman.

Hypsipyle imagines that if by some chance the wind had forced the Argo on its return voyage from Colchis to land on the shores of Lemnos, she would have shown herself to be a cruel murderess. Jason, although he certainly would deserve to die (146-48), she would spare. With stunning cruelty, harshly

underlining her anger with the alliterated “s” sound, she relishes the possibility of encountering Medea—*paelicis ipsa meos implem sanguine vultus, / quosque veneficiis abstulit illa tuos* (“with the blood of your concubine I would have filled my face and your face that she stole away from me with her poisons,” 149–50). Yet she immediately follows this hypothetical threat with the statement *Medeae Medea forem* (“I would become Medea to Medea,” 151), indicating that the violence and power she attributes to her own action mirrors the actions she believes Medea capable of performing. Indeed Medea has already performed similar sorts of murderous actions, while for Hypsipyle they occur as possibilities for her own behavior only in so far as she remains their author within a contra-factual condition. Indeed, the reader knows that when the possibility presented itself to Hypsipyle to commit atrocities, while all the women around her massacred the Lemnian men, she alone shrank from the deed.¹⁰¹

Equally chillingly, she utters curses against Medea that she might end her life bereft of her sons and her husband, an exile—*erret inops, exspes, caede cruenta sua* (“may she wander, destitute, stripped of all hope, bloodstained from the murders she has committed,” 162). The reader recalls one of the activities Hypsipyle previously attributed to Medea, that she “*devovet*” *absentes* (“hurls curses upon absent victims,” 91). Indeed, as she draws her epistle to a close, Hypsipyle twice mirrors this behavior, even underscoring in language the connection she forges with her final line: *vivite devoto nuptaque virque toro* (“live as husband and wife in an accursed marriage-bed,” 164). Hypsipyle clothes herself in the behavior of her rival, powerful enough to transgress the boundaries of the law.¹⁰²

To quite a large extent, although in a somewhat less clearly delineated fashion, Medea’s desire in *Heroides* 12 follows a pattern similar to Hypsipyle’s. Although a number of scholars have questioned Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 12, the letter from Medea to Jason,¹⁰³ stronger arguments have been presented against such a claim. On the one hand, in a direct response to the most recent charges of inauthenticity, Stephen Hinds has persuasively shown the subjective basis on which philological methods to determine priority or authenticity are predicated. Revisiting the central arguments that Peter Knox makes against Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 12, Hinds puts what he calls a different

"spin" on them. Starting from the premise that Ovid indeed wrote the poem, Hinds examines each of Knox's points, and comes to diametrically opposed conclusions from the same material.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, critics focusing on intertextual readings have compellingly presented the self-consciously allusive interaction, an Ovidian trademark, between the various Medeas of Ovid's poetic oeuvre as well as between the Medea of *Heroides* 12 and Hypsipyle of *Heroides* 6.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Hinds elegantly terms Hypsipyle's *Medea Medae forem* ("I would become Medea to Medea," 6.151) "the programmatic invitation to read one as a palimpsest of the other."¹⁰⁶ I too believe that *Heroides* 12 is an Ovidian composition, and to the evidence provided by the dynamic intertextuality I add the argument that Medea's attempts at self-characterization replicate those of Hypsipyle in *Heroides* 6.

Medea longs to have Jason recognize her as the object of his desire. She voices a plea: *redde torum, pro quo tot res insana reliqui* ("return to our marriage-bed for the sake of which I, crazed, left behind so many things," 193).¹⁰⁷ She expresses her desire: *te peto, quem merui, quem nobis ipse dedisti* ("I ask for you, whom I have deserved, whom you yourself pledged to me," 197). Further she wishes, rather than be forced to live without him, that they had died together crushed in the Symplegades, *nostraque adhaererent ossibus ossa tuis* ("I wish that my bones were cleaving to your bones," 122). The positioning of the words in the line mirrors the desire for the mingling that the words express.

As in *Heroides* 6, the desire to be Jason's object of desire leads the heroine to construct a sharply divided self-depiction. The split characterization of Medea that emerges from this letter reveals, on the one hand, a young, naïve girl, helpless, devoted to Jason, and, on the other, an uncompromisingly powerful woman who guided Jason through many difficulties and ensured his success, a woman capable of betraying father and kingdom as well as of committing murder. Like the rest of the heroines in this collection, desire draws Medea to weld together two incongruous self-portraits¹⁰⁸ that are nicely encapsulated by the oxymoronic description she offers of herself at line 118: *femina nocens* ("a (weak) woman capable of causing harm").¹⁰⁹ On the one hand, she seems to have read Hypsipyle's self-construction in *Heroides* 6 as gentle, loving, and helplessly devoted to Jason. Medea also seems to be aware of the literary tradition about Creusa, Jason's

new, innocent child-bride. Medea actively defines herself, in one strand of self-characterization, in opposition to both of them—*nocens*.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, by characterizing herself as an innocent, powerless creature, in effect a *femina*, Medea seeks to construct herself as if she were the mirror-reflection of a composite between Hypsipyle, the past, and Creusa, the current object of Jason's desire.

In the past lie Jason's arrival in Colchis and Medea's decision to betray her father and help the young hero. She has treacherously butchered her brother and scattered his limbs upon the sea to hinder the pursuit of her father, who was trying to prevent Jason from absconding with both the golden fleece and his daughter. She has brutally tricked the daughters of Pelias into slaughtering their father, falsely promising them that they were rejuvenating him. She and Jason have had two sons and are living in Corinth. Jason, however, has just decided to abandon Medea and their offspring, driving them from his home. Now he will take yet another new bride for himself, this time Creusa, the king's young daughter. At this moment, Medea addresses him in her epistle.

Like the heroine of *Heroides* 6, Medea offers Jason reasons for returning to her. Through her self-construction, she attempts to stress just how desirable she is to him. And like Hypsipyle, Medea presents herself, on the one hand, as the antithesis of her rival(s), or those she conceives of as her rivals. As if placing a positive spin on her characterization at the hands of Hypsipyle in *Heroides* 6, to which the Lemnian woman sharply contrasted herself, Medea emphatically depicts herself as a powerful woman. She begins by calling herself *Colchorum regina* ("queen of the Colchians," 1), although her father held sway when she lived there and she could have been no more than a princess. Enhancing this self-portrayal, she never refers to her father as king, choosing either to use his name (lines 29, 51) or to speak of him as "father" (lines 26, 109, 159).¹¹¹ When she refers back to her role in aiding Jason when he had to yoke the bulls of Mars and sow the crop of earth-born men, although at first she describes it in terms of childlike fear at the dangers he will encounter,¹¹² by the middle of the letter she accepts that the hero proved successful and overcame her father because of her intervention. She asks: *dos ubi sit, quaeris?* ("do you seek to know where your dowry is?" 199) and

proceeds to list the ways in which she has been of use to him. The priceless dowry she brings him takes the shape of the golden fleece, his own life, and the safety of each and every one of his crewmen (201ff). Coldly and ironically, she emphasizes how much he owes to her: *quod vivis, quod habes nuptam socerumque potentes, / hoc ipsum, ingratus quod potes esse, meum est* ("the fact that you are alive, that you have a wife and a father-in-law, both powerful, the very fact that you are able to be ungrateful to me—those very things are my doing," 205–6). Her power is so great that she attributes her abandonment to her own actions.¹¹³

Indeed, she revels in this power. Despite her abandonment, she flaunts her former usefulness to Jason in hopes that he might remember and recognize it. She recalls her deeds: *flammea subduxi medicato lumina somno / et tibi, quae raperes, vellera tuta dedi* ("I subdued the serpent's blazing eyes with a drug-induced sleep and I gave you the fleece intact so that you might steal it," 107–8). Nor does she altogether deny that in helping Jason she betrayed her homeland, confessing somewhat vaguely *proditus est genitor, regnum patriamque reliqui* ("my father was betrayed, and I left behind my kingdom and my homeland," 109). Moreover, although she portrays herself as if she were too horrified by the deed to do more than allude to it cryptically (yet certainly understandably to the intertextual reader),¹¹⁴ she chooses the variant of her story in which she, rather than Jason, kills her brother.¹¹⁵ Consciously she manipulates her self-representation so as to highlight her capacity to undertake forceful, even criminal, action without fear. Indeed she acknowledges that she has committed wrongs for which she deserves punishment. Her kin and countrymen can rejoice now that she in turn suffers at the hands of Jason. Bitterly she apostrophizes them, crying out in a couplet tense in its contrasts: *laese pater, gaude! Colchi gaudete relict! / inferias umbrae fratris habete mei!* ("Injured father, rejoice! Colchians left behind, rejoice! Shade of my brother, receive your honorific sacrifices!" 159–61). As to the brutal murder of Pelias, which she tricked his daughters into committing, she in no way attempts to escape her responsibility for the horrifying deed. Tersely she reduces the event to the incontestable rhetorical question: *quid referam Peliae natas pietate nocentes / caesaque virginea membra paterna manu?* ("what am I to say about the daughters of Pelias guilty of piety and about paternal limbs cut down by a virginal hand?" 129–30).

Moreover, glimpses into a ferocious anger and pride that motivate her and threaten greater future crimes complete the picture she draws of herself, in sharp contrast to both Hypsipyle and Creusa, as a powerful woman capable of horrific actions when given sufficient reason. Conjuring up the image of herself as potent sorceress, she predicts *dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt succusque veneni, / hostis Medae nullus inultus erit* ("as long as sword, fire, and poison exist, no enemy of Medea's will escape her vengeance," 181-83). Finally resembling the invincible Medea, who pays no heed to human laws or to ties of kin, imagined in *Heroides* 6 as Hypsipyle's antithesis, she threatens even more murders as she announces cryptically (but comprehensibly to the intertextual reader): *ingentes parturit ira minas. / quo feret ira, sequar!* ("anger gives birth to monstrous threats; I shall follow where anger will lead me," 208-9), and even more terrifyingly *nescioquid certe mens mea maius agit* ("clearly my mind drives toward something greater," 212).¹¹⁶

On the other hand, and constantly competing with the characterization of Medea as the powerful woman capable, for love's sake, of committing actions ranging from questionable to downright criminal, stands a second portrait that she attempts to create for herself. She constructs herself as a naïve and innocent girl compelled by her overwhelming feelings of love for Jason to commit certain acts she considers heinous. Interpreters traditionally explain the dichotomy in Medea by pointing out that the two depictions of the heroine in the "source texts," Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Euripides' *Medea*, correspond to the two sides of the heroine in *Heroides* 12.¹¹⁷ I want to suggest, however, that while no doubt there is significant overlap between the "source texts" and Medea's twofold self-characterization, there do exist significant moments of divergence when Medea in her childlike, helpless incarnation, deviates from her character in the Apollonian source text. These differences lead me to locate the explanation for Medea's self-representation elsewhere than in the competing portraits of the heroine in prior literature. As was the case with her self-construction as a powerful woman, Hypsipyle and Creusa lurk behind the second attempt of Medea at self-fashioning. Both their depictions in traditional tellings as devoted, gentle, powerless, and especially the strand of Hypsipyle's self-reconstruction from *Heroides* 6 that stands in stark

opposition to her vision of Medea, provide material for the Colchian woman.¹¹⁸ Because of her feminine desire to be the object of Jason's desire, Medea identifies with Jason's former and current objects of desire, differentiating herself from these women yet also desperately struggling to liken herself to them.

Medea's self-presentation in the guise of Hypsipyle/Creusa takes two distinct forms. The Colchian woman manipulates verbal echoes of *Heroides* 6 to fashion herself as a second Hypsipyle. Describing the moment at which the Argonauts arrived on Lemnos, Hypsipyle reveals that her first instinct was to drive the men away (6.51–52); *sed me mea fata trahebant* ("but my fates were dragging me along," 6.51), she explains. Similarly, with no more than a change in conjunction from Hypsipyle's *sed* ("but") to her own *et* ("and"), Medea evokes her first encounter with Jason (12.35).¹¹⁹ And this verbal mirroring continues. In a line that gives critics pause, Medea blames *credulitas* ("credulousness," 12.120) on her part for the crimes she has committed in the name of love. Verducci perspicaciously notes that Medea's glaring choice of word reflects Hypsipyle's similar statement in *Heroides* 6—*credula res amor est* ("love is an emotion that causes credulity," 6.21).¹²⁰ Turning her attention to her children, Medea asks Jason to think about their offspring *nimum similes tibi* ("who resemble you too much," 12.189). She echoes the sentiment Hypsipyle expresses about her twins: *si quaeris, cui sint similes, cognosceris illis. / fallere non norunt; cetera patris habent* ("if you seek to know whom they resemble, you are recognized in them; they do not know how to deceive, but have all the rest of their father's traits," 6.123–24). As Hypsipyle hoped (6.119–25), so Medea suggests that perhaps the children can serve to increase the mother's value, asking the self-effacing question *si tibi sum vilis, communes respice natos* ("if I am valueless to you, consider the children we have in common," 12.187).¹²¹

Medea employs her children one more time in an attempt to construct herself as a second Hypsipyle. Medea indicates that she fears sending her offspring to plead their mother's case before their father and their new stepmother. When she suggests, *saviet in partus dira noverca meos* ("the harsh stepmother will rage against my children," 12.188), both in the choice of the noun *noverca* ("stepmother") and in its placement with its modifier in the pentameter, Medea echoes the sentiments and the words of

Hypsipyle—*sed tenuit coeptas saeva noverca vias* ("but a savage stepmother held back the plans that I had undertaken," 6.126). Mirroring both Hypsipyle's words and her sentiments, Medea now sets Creusa in the place that Medea held in Hypsipyle's imagination.¹²²

Medea also struggles to reproduce herself as Creusa and/or Hypsipyle by representing their characteristics as her own. Striving to paint a clear picture of her guilelessness, Medea fastens upon the helplessness born from the innocence, the naïveté of the love she first felt for Jason. Describing in vivid detail the moment when she first caught sight of the hero, she exclaims: *et vidi et perii! nec notis ignibus arsi, / ardet ut ad magnos pinea taeda deos* ("I saw him and I perished! I burned with unknown fires as a pine torch burns in tribute to the great gods," 33–34). Capturing the elegiac tone of extreme passion and mixing in the notion of its purity by comparing it to a fire kindled for the gods, Medea creates quite a different image of herself from the competing one in this poem and from her construction in *Heroides* 6. One cannot help undercutting this image, however, with a fleeting consideration of the fire that belongs in the story of Creusa and the blazing flames that consume her and her father as the princess innocently dons the dress and crown that Medea sends to her as a wedding present.¹²³ As with Hypsipyle's forceful self-presentation as a curse-hurling murderess, so Medea's self-construction as helpless and entirely devoted to Jason, begins to make sense if one considers it a carefully staged attempt by the heroine to liken herself to her (perceived) rival.

Feigning an innocence and vulnerability reminiscent of Creusa, Medea refers to herself twice in the space of three lines as a *puella* ("young girl"), once modifying it with the striking adjective *simplex* ("inexperienced," 89–92). Of course she was overwhelmed by his words and his charm, after all she was a mere child and unworldly at that. Moreover, although some critics argue here that Medea takes on the persona of her Apollonian character (or tries to),¹²⁴ a closer examination of the *Argonautica* shows that Ovid's heroine diverges from her Apollonian precursor. While the Ovidian Medea claims in her naïve innocence and devotion to have been convinced to help Jason and betray her father by the hero's words, Apollonius' heroine has made up her mind to assist Jason before she meets with him.¹²⁵ I suggest, then,

that she mimics not the Apollonian Medea but rather the Ovidian Hypsipyle, constructing herself to resemble the Lemnian queen who, swept away (she claims) by a similar innocent devotion born from a face to face meeting with the hero, decided to become Jason's lover. This reading can be further bolstered. Federica Bessone, in her commentary on *Heroides* 12, notes that the Ovidian Medea, in direct contrast to the Apollonian heroine, removes the sense of moral conflict from her decision to aid Jason and become his lover.¹²⁶ Again the Hypsipyle of *Heroides* 6, and not prior literary Medeas, provides the key to the Ovidian Medea's self-representation. Ovid's Medea attempts to render her situation a replica of Hypsipyle's, who, by emphasizing that her relationship to Jason constituted a marriage,¹²⁷ removes all questions of morality from their liason.

Medea's innocent devotion and elegiac passion remain with her even in her abandonment; love for Jason, she insists, *me sequitur semper* ("always follows me," 136). In a surprising twist she calls him the one *qui nobis omnia solus erat* ("who alone was everything to me," 162). Moreover, if Gianpiero Rosati is correct in his defense of the reading of line 110—*munus in exilio quodlibet esse tuli* (rather than *quod licet esse*)—on the grounds that it means: "I endured to be, while in exile, an ordinary war prize," Medea states her utter, even abject, devotion to Jason.¹²⁸ Nothing, no charms, no magic can relieve her of her love; wretched in abandonment, vulnerable yet helpless, she knows no rest from her torment. Dramatically she laments:

ipsi me cantus herbaeque artesque relinquunt;
 nil dea, nil Hecates sacra potentis agunt.
 non mihi grata dies, noctes vigilantur amarae,
 nec tener, a! miserae pectora somnus habet. (167–70)

[My spells, my magic potions, my skills—these very things forsake me. The goddess and the sacred mysteries of powerful Hecate are useless. The day does not please me; bitter nights are spent in sleeplessness. And soft sleep, alas, does not invade my breast, wretch that I am.]

In *Heroides* 6 Hypsipyle claims that Medea exerts her influence over Jason only because of powerful magic, an unnatural and sinister ability that Hypsipyle herself does not possess. Again striving to make herself similar to Hypsipyle, Medea now denies

her powers as sorceress. Medea employs a similar tactic in discussing how, terrified, she sat and watched Jason as he performed the tasks demanded of him by her father. The woman who gave him the magic to ensure his success, the woman who acknowledges this, also describes herself as a timid and powerless onlooker, afraid for the safety of the man she loves: *ipsa ego, quae dederam medicamina, pallida sedi* ("I myself, who had provided the magic potions, sat there pale with fear," 97). Again, contrary to critical opinion, Medea does not attempt here to resemble her Apollonian "self." In the *Argonautica* the reader never hears Medea's reaction to Jason's feats because she is not present. She remains in her bedchamber awaiting the outcome.¹²⁹ Ovid's heroine attempts to repudiate her image of powerful witch not by imitating her Apollonian precursor but instead by seeking to paint herself one more time in the guise of Hypsipyle. And Medea has carefully studied *Heroides* 6. Hypsipyle registers extreme terror for Jason because of his trials. Ascertaining before the story begins that the hero is alive, Hypsipyle still becomes so caught up in the excitement of the narration of events that she breaks in to ask a second time whether Jason still lives (6.31-38).¹³⁰ In *Heroides* 12 Medea recasts Hypsipyle's helpless fear as her own.

In her final and perhaps most jarring attempt to portray herself as naïve and dutifully loving, Medea seems to seek an explanation for her actions that shifts the blame away from herself and onto Jason. All she did, she did for him. She wonders why they were not dashed to pieces as they made their escape in the Argo, why he did not suffer punishment for *fraus* ("deceit") and she for *credulitas* ("credulity," 120). These lines give critics pause; how can Medea, after a lengthy exposé of her actions in Colchis, possibly consider *credulitas* her only crime? Twelve lines later in her discussion of the murder of Pelias she addresses Jason as the man *pro quo sum totiens esse coacta nocens* ("for whose sake I was so often compelled to behave criminally," 132). The reader pulls up short again.¹³¹ How can she say this? What is she up to? Medea tries to draw herself in comparable terms to the current and past objects of Jason's desire as she desperately struggles to find a way to regain that position for herself. In the early lines of the poem she attempts straightforward, overt comparison, *hoc illic Medea fui, nova nupta quod hic est; / quam pater est illi, tam mihi*

dives erat ("what Medea was there, your new bride is here; as wealthy as her father is, so wealthy was mine," 25–26), dividing each line into equal, parallel halves to emphasize the resemblance she constructs.¹³² She also struggles to achieve her vision of similarity with more convoluted manipulations of fact. By carefully scrutinizing her rival(s) and identifying with them according to the structure of feminine desire, Medea presents herself to Jason, as Hypsipyle did before her, as a performer of two roles, powerful and helpless, with the express purpose of re-awakening his desire for her.

Conclusions

Lacan's theories of desire serve to deepen our reading of Ovid's heroines. Through a Lacanian lens, these characters become both more complex and more understandable. The tendency toward self-marginalization, primarily in evidence when one considers the epistolary aspects of the *Heroides*, metamorphoses into a more complicated strategy of self-representation when one reads the women in light of the structure of feminine desire. Dido, Phyllis, and Ariadne, seeking to transform themselves into the object-cause of the heroes' desire, carefully construct themselves for their lovers. Understanding both that the masculine subject enjoys feeling a sense of his own potency and that he enters into a relationship of identification with the object of his desire, the heroines choose to act out roles that serve to offer the hero a tangible sense of his power.

Hypsipyle and Medea also fashion themselves for Jason with an eye to the roles that will capture his desire. These two heroines carefully consider the other woman (women) in Jason's life and imagine themselves in a relationship of identification to this woman (these women). On the one hand, both Medea and Hypsipyle construct themselves as distinct from their rivals. On the other hand, the heroines seek to create resemblances between themselves and their rivals. The structure of feminine desire as Lacan sets it forth explains the ways in which all five of Ovid's heroines operate, as they struggle to represent themselves as object-cause of desire, to imagine what the heroes desire and to present themselves as just that. The heroines offer us, then, a

compelling portrait of the erotic relationship and the performances that it demands of the feminine subject.

But now let us turn to examine more closely the issue of performance. On the subject of the abstraction, "Woman," Lacan announces: "There's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal. There's no such thing as Woman because, in her essence . . . she is not-whole."¹³³ In other words, Lacan argues that there exists no universal characteristic that serves to describe all women, that no generalization is possible about Woman. One cannot say anything about Woman that gets at the whole of her; one cannot define her. One can define the roles she plays, and yet, she is more than just those roles—but the "more" remains always beyond our ability to pin it down. This does not mean, of course, that we do not attempt to categorize, to generalize, only that any such attempt inevitably constructs an illusion.

Although, on the one hand, the *Heroides* offer a subtle and perceptive reading of the woman in an erotic relationship, on the other, the Ovidian text also, through the use of repetition, subtly creates Woman. While the text perceptively reveals the performances that the erotic relationship demands of a feminine subject, the *Heroides* simultaneously place an effective limit on the number and kind of roles she plays. Although we have observed differences in the strategies adopted by Dido, Phyllis, and Ariadne to construct themselves as desirable, and those adopted by Medea and Hypsipyle, a close examination reveals that the performances they act out, stripped down to basics, betray underlying similarities. All the women manipulate their self-representations to appear in two, irreconcilable roles: powerful and also helpless. Each letter, therefore, one after another, reveals a heroine who resembles her counterparts in the contortions she enacts upon her self-representation. The relentless repetition of the identical roles the heroines perform creates an overwhelming sense not of women's protean and therefore indefinable natures, but rather of their ultimate sameness or homogeneity. In a manner that Lacanian theory renders understandable, Ovid's poems present a fantasy as they strive to generalize about Woman, isolating a universal characteristic, a unifying principle by which to categorize her.

As the heroines meld, because of the iterative qualities of their self-representations, into Woman, we must again question whether they represent a masculine construction of the feminine. As we recall from chapter 1, the choice of the epistolary form, according to its generic conventions, encourages the reader to accept the heroines as “real” women, allowing the poet to efface his presence and thus to create the illusion that we are listening to authentic female voices. We must now, once again, be attentive to the illusion Ovid so carefully fashions. And it is in the light of the poet’s transvestite ventriloquism that we must consider the poet’s attempts to create Woman out of women. Let us now turn to the final epistle in the Ovidian collection, the letter from Sappho to Phaon, which, for many reasons, will serve as the means to conclude our investigation of the female voice in the *Heroides*.

3

Setting Her Straight

Ovid Re-Presents Sappho

Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you're strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.

Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*

Reading *Heroides* 15

We have seen in chapter 2 that Ovid, in pointing out women's penchant for taking on roles in erotic relationships, shows himself a perceptive observer and an astute chronicler of feminine desire and the behavior it demands of women. And yet, one heroine after another, with relentless repetition, offers a self-representation in which she exists only as a series of carefully crafted, but identical, performances. Through the persistent repetition of these roles by heroines who go to great lengths to underscore their similarities, the *Heroides* leave us with the disquieting feeling that all women are the same. We must now

probe the *Heroides*' definition of Woman as a performer limited to two acts.

Lacan would argue, as we have noted, that to construct Woman is to manufacture an illusion, a fantasy. It remains impossible, Lacan claims, to produce any universal truth about Woman, even if the impetus to do so exerts a powerful force on all of us. But here some may complain that employing Lacan to elucidate an Ovidian text is an anachronism. The fifteenth and final epistle in the collection of single *Heroides* will lead us to consider ancient evidence for a definition of Woman that appears remarkably similar, in fundamental ways, to the theoretical speculations of Lacan. Sappho composes *Heroides* 15, a heroine who emerges with a prior textual history fashioned quite strikingly by a woman's hand. I shall argue that Sappho's poetry, despite the fragmentary condition in which it survives for us, produces a fascinating, complex, multivalent picture of women. Recent feminist readings of the Sapphic fragments illustrate how difficult the text makes it to categorize all women according to one definition. Indeed, Sappho's poems celebrate women in their diffuse and diverse natures. For Sappho, as for Lacan, "there's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal."¹ And yet, when Ovid rewrites Sappho, the Ovidian heroine brings the *Heroides* to its conclusion with a self-portrait that resembles those of her counterparts. She too appears as the same disjointed amalgamation of the same disunified characteristics, a player of the same roles to recapture her former lover's desire.

The profound difference between the women of Sapphic lyric and the self-representation of the Ovidian Sappho raises questions about the implications of Ovid's choice in the *Heroides* to ventriloquize the voices of fifteen heroines lamenting erotic abandonment. Sappho offers the means by which to examine the issue of the appropriation of the female voice. A comparative study of her own poetry, the product of a female speaker, in conjunction with *Heroides* 15, Ovid's re-presentation of Sappho in what he pretends is her own voice, grants the tools for the exploration. As the epistolary collection reaches its end, the long-awaited and long-anticipated opportunity to confront head-on the poetic "transvestite ventriloquism" operative throughout the work emerges. The question stands: "Ovid writes 'like a woman'

in the *Heroides* by adopting multiple female personae; Sappho is a woman writing—what is the difference?”²

First, however, before we can begin to answer the question, we must briefly grapple with the issue of Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 15. Can we actually use this poem in a discussion of the Ovidian collection? Certainly questions about the authenticity of the *epistula Sapphus* have received considerable scholarly attention. By the mid-1970s, however, such unanimity reigned within the critical debate that one literary interpreter could cast his vote for the poem’s authentic Ovidian authorship with the statement that he makes “no courageous assertion at a time when consensus has come around to this opinion.”³ Nevertheless, two decades and a half later, lingering doubts remain that prevent the universal attribution of the poem to Ovid. The argument about whether or not the poem is spurious revolves around particular philological questions, as well as issues of content.

Two separate philological arguments fuel the impetus to declare *Heroides* 15 non-Ovidian. Scholars point to linguistic, metrical, and stylistic divergences from standard usage in Augustan and/or early Ovidian poetry and therefore claim, on the grounds of internal evidence, that Ovid did not write Sappho’s letter.⁴ Such arguments, however, remain less clear-cut than the scholars proposing them contend.⁵ One can certainly imagine perfectly valid reasons for Ovid’s anomalous word usage. For example, in the case of Sappho, Ovid had access to a body of poetic material composed by the very woman whose voice he was ventriloquizing. Perhaps the archaisms observable in *Heroides* 15 but absent in Latin poetry of the Augustan period reflect Ovid’s attempt to capture in his Latin rendering something of Sappho’s poetry, which presumably had an archaic ring. Further, it is not inconceivable that imitations of the language in Sapphic poems now lost to us inspired at least some of the usages that critics find odd in the Ovidian poem.⁶ Indeed, *Heroides* 15, as we shall see, features many recognizable echoes of extant Sapphic fragments.

The fact that *Heroides* 15 survives for us in a manuscript tradition separate from the text of *Heroides* 1–14 presents the second substantial philological challenge to the letter’s authenticity.⁷ Those who reject the epistle of Sappho because of its textual transmission, however, must grapple with a piece of seemingly contradictory evidence from Ovid’s own pen. *Amores* 2.18, lines

21–34, where the poet offers a catalogue of his various poetic creations, provides evidence external to *Heroides* 15 that the epistle's authorship is genuine. Twice he refers to the *Heroides*, first enumerating some of the collection's letter-writing heroines, then playfully recalling the heroes' responses that his poet-friend, Sabinus, invented. Twice (26, 34) Sappho appears at the end of Ovid's list, whereas Penelope (21, 29) takes her place as the first heroine whom the poet mentions. In this way, Ovid neatly crafts his catalogues so that the order in which his heroines appear, Penelope first and Sappho last, mirrors the positions of their letters, first and last respectively, in the *Heroides*. While critics may argue about how exhaustive the list is,⁸ in either case Sappho's appearance in Ovid's discussion indicates that he did indeed include an epistle composed in her character within the larger corpus of the *Heroides*. To assume that Ovid wrote an *epistula Sapphus*, that over time it got lost, that someone else, pretending to be Ovid and having read *Amores* 2.18, wrote a second letter from Sappho to Phaon, and finally that this second letter somehow became accepted as Ovidian, seems a needlessly complicated scenario.⁹

The arguments that seek to question Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 15 leave room for debate. But one can present interpretive reasons for accepting the *epistula Sapphus* we have as the poem Ovid himself claims he wrote in *Amores* 2.18. As Gianpiero Rosati has proposed in a recent article, philological evidence, especially if it is not incontrovertible, should not be the sole means for gauging the authenticity of an artistic product. He draws on "characteristics above all of compositional technique," and suggests that arguments based on interpretation or forms of representation should hold great weight in any debate about authorship.¹⁰ Rosati himself points to the perfect symmetry created in the collection with the inclusion of *Heroides* 15. How witty, how playful—in essence, how Ovidian—that in the second line of the first poem Penelope orders Ulysses not to reply, while in the second to last line of the final poem, Sappho begs Phaon for a response. By opening up the possibility at the conclusion of *Heroides* 15 that the hero might now, in turn, put pen to paper, does Ovid mark the close of the single *Heroides* and provide a segue into the paired letters of hero and heroine in the double *Heroides*?¹¹ With a similar attention to Ovid's propensity, especially at the openings and closings of his works, to refer quite

reflexively and self-consciously to his own poetic activity, Joseph Farrell notes that the fifteenth epistle begins by calling itself a *breve opus* ("a brief work," 4). He argues that *opus* is a tellingly Ovidian tag, a form of *sphragis* ("seal"), that appears toward the conclusion of many of Ovid's poetic collections.¹² With what amounts to a signature Ovid marks the end of the *Heroides*. I too see something very Ovidian about the *epistula Sapphus*. For me, the strong similarities between the heroine's striking self-portrait in the missive from Sappho to Phaon and those in the remaining fourteen letters of the single *Heroides* provide the best evidence that Ovid is indeed the author of *Heroides* 15.¹³

Let us now return to the original question. Is there a difference between Ovid writing "like a woman" in the *Heroides* and a woman—Sappho—writing? For the first time, in *Heroides* 15, the opportunity arises to read the Ovidian text in conjunction with a female construction of women, as opposed to prior male tellings of their stories. Scholars who see *Heroides* 15 as non-Ovidian stress the difference between the "historical" Sappho and the "mythological" leading women in the other fourteen epistles. But, that Sappho, unlike the other heroines, exists as a historical figure should not present a problem for the reader of the epistolary collection. More than in her mythological status, Ovid locates his interest in each heroine's prior *literary* manifestations; for Sappho, as for each of the other women, there exist prior texts. Indeed, while there are multiple tellings of each heroine's story, Ovid draws primarily on one main text. I argue that he follows a similar practice with Sappho. Ovid was certainly aware of Sappho's rich afterlife in Greek comedy where she appeared as a lascivious and insatiable heterosexual. The story of her unrequited love for Phaon, attested in none of the Sapphic fragments, is a product of these comedies.¹⁴ And yet, while he turned to the lively dramatic tradition about Sappho to procure a story for her of failed, heterosexual passion, I suggest that Ovid's intertextual focus is neither on these comedies nor on the powerful Catullan appropriation of her famous fragment 31. Rather, he engages primarily with the textual *persona*, the poetic "I" of Sappho's own poetry, as his principal source when he creates his version of her character in *Heroides* 15.

The suggestion that Ovid writes his Sappho through echoes to her poetry lies at the heart of many interpretations of *Heroides* 15.

According to these readings the poem reveals Ovidian attempts to establish his own poetic reputation. Some argue that he uses references and allusions to Sappho's poetry in an effort to prove his poetic superiority. As he appropriates Sappho, twisting and manipulating her poetic voice, forcing her submission to his poetic mastery, he increases his own literary stature.¹⁵ In an alternative reading, one that does not determine winners and losers, Ovid engages in an artistic competition with Sappho through his intertextual dialogue with her work.¹⁶ Each of these arguments, while certainly noting significant intertextual points of comparison, ultimately focuses on Ovid's relationship with his reading public in the *Heroides*, rather than on the heroine. Once again I seek to shift attention onto the woman, proposing to consider the use Ovid makes of the Sapphic intertext, in particular feminist readings of the Sapphic lyric in conjunction with Lacanian theories of desire, when he constructs his Sappho.

When Sappho writes about women, she expresses thoughts and emotions—ideas about herself and ways of considering others—utterly separate from those envisioned by male authors.¹⁷ Ovid presents his version of Sappho and her desire in *Heroides* 15, wittily calling attention to his maneuver through pointed borrowings from Sappho's poetry. Ovid's Sappho, however, appears virtually indistinguishable from his other fourteen heroines, themselves at odds with Sappho's representations of women. To explain the appropriation of Sappho's voice and of her sexuality, focusing on the transformation that occurs between feminine homoerotic desire and its expression in Sapphic poetry, and the reconfiguration of Sappho and her desire in the fifteenth Ovidian epistle is, I believe, the key to reading this poetic collection. The significant discrepancy between the construction of women in the Sapphic "source text" and the representation of Woman reinforced by an Ovidian Sappho who resembles her fourteen counterparts will allow us to consider how Ovid fashions Woman in the *Heroides*.

Sappho's Voices: Women Speak Feminine Desire(s)

Joan DeJean observes about the appropriation of Sapphic material by later writers: "The history of Sappho's fictionalization

has much to teach us about the evolving discourse of gender, the construction of sexual difference through notions of the feminine and the masculine. All fictions of Sappho are fictions of the feminine. . . . The history of Sappho's fictionalization is a constantly evolving projection of fantasies of Woman."¹⁸ In order to explore Ovid's fictionalization of Sappho, we must begin with Sappho's own verse. Her poetry reveals an authentic (by which I mean not produced by cross-gendered ventriloquism) female voice, self-consciously polyphonous, expressing feminine homoerotic desire. Through a reading of some of the Sapphic fragments, I want to explore the multiple definitions the poet sets forth for women and their desire(s), and in this way to highlight the marked differences between Sappho's women and the heroine lamenting her erotic abandonment whom Ovid constructs in the *Heroides*. Ovid's abandoned women—fifteen in a row—create self-portraits that foreground their homogeneity, as they act out two main roles in order to ensure their status as objects of desire. In sharp contrast, Sappho's poems, despite the fragmentary state in which they survive for us, suggest many definitions for women, especially by means of a staunch refusal to create a uniform picture. When Ovid's reconfigured Sappho radically alters the Greek poet's vision of feminine subjects and their sexuality, drawing attention to the divergences from the Sapphic fragments through the allusions she makes to the Greek "source text," and reconstructs herself so that she resembles the rest of the women in the *Heroides*, she lays bare the fantasy of Woman that emerges from Ovid's text.

I begin with Sappho, with the poems that best shed light on the Ovidian Sappho's intertextual dialogue. Recent critical interpretations of her poetry, to a large extent from a feminist perspective, have opened up new and fruitful readings of the Sapphic fragments.¹⁹ I propose to consider Ovid's re-presented Sappho through the lens of these feminist readings that offer compelling possibilities for the Sapphic constructions of feminine subjectivity and sexuality, especially in conjunction with Lacanian arguments about the lack of a universal Woman. Sappho's poetry, as we shall see, raises questions that re-emerge centuries later in Lacan's writings concerning the possibility of generalizing about, and universally defining, Woman.

Recent explorations of the Sapphic fragments focus on how Sappho's poetry produces a metaphorical space beyond the confines of normative, patriarchal ways of thinking, a space in which she imagines a separate world of women.²⁰ Indeed, the newness and originality in the way she expresses her private, feminine emotions and women's desire from a woman's point of view, requires that she carve out an equally novel space from which to speak; she creates a space within which women can become the central focus in relationships of desire. And yet, while feminist critics articulate Sappho's difference in terms of metaphorical space—or, as Teresa de Lauretis describes it, in terms of the poet's claim to an "eccentric discursive position outside the male . . . monopoly of power"²¹—nevertheless, throughout Sappho's poetry, this alternative, newly carved out space remains simultaneously metaphorical and physical.

Sappho fashions a unique and carefully crafted backdrop, a physical setting, for a large number of her verses that celebrate feminine homoerotic desire. In poem after poem, she evokes the setting either through a direct description of a particular location, like the grove in fragment 2,²² or by means of elaborate similes and comparisons, like the use of the moon and nocturnal sky in fragment 96. (I shall return to both of these poems.) Deliberately shaping the space within which she chooses to locate herself and her text, from which she can enunciate a new and feminine poetics of desire, Sappho constructs a private world of gardens, groves, flowers, moons, and stars. The diverse and multifarious nature of the physical setting remains its most salient feature. One cannot attribute a universal characteristic to the spaces of Sappho's private world. It is perhaps because she feels compelled to establish a locus from which to speak as a woman, to women, about women²³ that this site becomes intimately bound up with feminine subjects and their desire(s).

Fragment 2 contains the most overt attempt to formulate a physical definition of the new Sapphic space. The poem seems to be an invocation to Aphrodite, an invitation to the goddess to appear at her shrine. The work in its current fragmentary state does not emphasize, however, whether the divinity chooses to appear. The poem focuses instead on the remarkable description of the setting in which the worship of the goddess takes place:

Hither to me from Krete, unto this holy temple, a place where there is a lovely grove of apples and an altar where the incense burns, and here is water which ripples cold through apple branches, and all the place is shadowed with roses, and as the leaves quiver a profound quiet ensues. And here is a meadow where horses graze, spring flowers bloom, the honeyed whisper of winds . . . This is the very place where you, Kypris . . . , drawing into golden cups the nectar gorgeously blended for our celebration, then pour it forth.²⁴

A quality of diffuseness reigns in this fragment. On the one hand, many elements—flowers, leaves, breezes, apple trees, a stream, a meadow, incense—merge to create the physical surroundings. And, as we shall see, the diverse components of the setting seem continually various and in flux from one Sapphic fragment to another. On the other hand, a dazzling array of images, arousing visual, aural, and olfactory pleasures, entices the reader; the sanctuary comes alive through a vivid description that stimulates a multiplicity of senses. Moreover, as many critics have noted, the description of the sanctuary ineluctably binds together feminine sexuality and Sappho's newly created space.²⁵ We shall soon observe how Sappho also marks feminine subjectivity and eroticism with notions of diversity and multiplicity. But first let us complete our exploration of Sappho's physical setting for women and their desire(s).

Fragment 96 provides evidence for the shifting nature of the physical setting that Sappho constructs. This fragment contains at its heart an extended simile in which the poet compares an absent woman to the moon. The extended simile serves to inscribe the relationship between the absent woman and Atthis within the private space of feminine desire:

. . . Sardis . . .
 . . . often here in her thoughts
 as though . . . we . . .
 she (honored?) you like a goddess
 plain to see and took greatest pleasure in your song.

But now she stands out among the Lydian women
 just as, at sun-
 set, the rosy fingered moon

surpasses all the stars; it casts its light
alike on the salt sea
the blossoming fields,

and the dew is scattered in beauty and
the roses bloom and the delicate chervil and the flowery melilote.

But wandering back and forth, she often
remembers gentle Atthis, and her fragile heart
is consumed with blanching desire.²⁶

In fragment 96 the moon and the stars join the list of features from fragment 2 that signal entry into the private physical space that Sappho creates for the feminine.²⁷ Many elements similar to those in fragment 2, yet in somewhat altered form, produce the setting. In fragment 96 the dew and the sea replace the water and the stream. Fields appear rather than a meadow, and the flowers are, to a large extent, of different varieties. The landscape that creates and signifies women and their desire(s) in Sappho's poems is not the same in every fragment. Moreover, the setting in fragment 96, as it did in fragment 2, evokes the arousal of various senses, but once again in a somewhat altered fashion. The reader sees the shining light of the moon and the stars (lines 8–9), hears the gentle lapping of the sea (lines 9–10), tastes its saltiness (line 10), feels the moistness of the spreading dew (line 12), and enjoys the scent of blooming flowers (lines 12–14).²⁸ The elements that constitute her physical setting as well as the responses it provokes remain multiple and diverse.

The multiplicity that characterizes Sappho's landscape also marks the poet's construction of women and their desire(s). While the Ovidian epistles we have examined so far go to great lengths to underscore the homogeneity of Woman, an exploration of some of Sappho's fragments reveals just the opposite. For Sappho women are multifarious, diverse, impossible to pin down with a uniform generalization that encompasses them all; the single, unifying statement one can make about Sappho's women is that they deny the feasibility and/or usefulness of any such statement. They are many things, often simultaneously or even in rapid succession. Indeed, several recent interpretations of Sapphic fragments, especially readings that center on gender as a significant exegetical tool, have noted the rather remarkable fact

that Sappho's poems highlight women's various, and constantly oscillating, positions as both desiring and desired.²⁹

Fragment 31 seems to feature a love triangle, a structure quite common to literary constructions of desire. The desire of a rival for an object serves to inspire one's own desire for that same object.³⁰ In other texts, the woman usually occupies the third position in the triangle, as the one for whom two men yearn, the object of their desire. The Sapphic text rejects the model. Indeed three people play roles in fragment 31 and two of them appear to desire the same woman. But one of the two rivals is also a woman and her voice alone holds the reader spellbound. Powerfully yet in a highly controlled fashion, the narrative voice expresses her feelings as desiring subject, leading the reader to focus exclusively upon her and her beloved:

That one seems to me to be like the gods, the man
whosoever sits facing you and listens nearby to your
sweet speech and desirable laughter—which surely
terrifies the heart in my chest; for as I look briefly at you,
so can I no longer speak at all, my tongue is silent, broken,
a silken fire suddenly has spread beneath my skin, with my
eyes I see nothing, my hearing hums, a cold sweat grips
me, a trembling seizes me entire, more pale than grass am
I, I seem to myself to be a little short of dead. But everything
is to be endured, since even a pauper . . .

Fragment 31 demonstrates well how Sappho depicts women in erotic relationships in such a way that they elude all attempts to reduce them to an essential definition. The women in this poem appear in a variety of manifestations. One woman, subject of her desire, reveals the depths and torments of her passion for a second woman, clearly the object of desire. At first glance there appear to be two different, and separate, possibilities open to women in an erotic relationship. And yet, Sappho further complicates the equation. As the narrator expresses her passion, her desire reveals that to consider her simply a subject runs the risk of being reductive. As the first-person narrator draws a distinction between herself, the subject of desire, and her desired object, the woman she intently watches, the narrator unveils her reactions to the experience of looking at her beloved. We get a very

detailed and specific list of the narrator's various, externally visible, bodily reactions; we are compelled to consider her in a very physical sense. The one who gazes, through her description of the activity of looking, turns the gaze in on herself;³¹ she becomes at once the one who sees and the one who is seen, simultaneously subject as well as object.³² Moreover, with dizzying speed, fragment 31 offers the narrator yet another permutation. Underscoring the impossibility of distilling women to a single definition, the poem also represents the erotic encounter in terms of a powerful dissolution of the boundaries separating self and other. When the first-person narrator describes her act of watching her beloved, what emerges is not only a change in her own status from subject to both subject and object but also a strange fusion of the viewer and the viewed.³³ As she identifies herself with, rather than differentiates herself from, the position of the one seen, the boundaries between self and other, subject and object of the gaze, collapse.

Fragment 16 similarly highlights the heterogeneous nature of women. Although the poem ostensibly treats the narrative subject's feelings toward the beautiful Anactoria, at the heart of this fragment lies a discussion about the concept of desire in general and a consideration of a woman's desire through the paradigm of Helen in particular:

Some assert that a troupe of horsemen, some of foot-soldiers, some that a fleet of ships is the most beautiful thing on the dark earth; but I assert that it is whatever anyone desires. It is quite simple to make this intelligible to all, for she who was far and away preeminent in beauty of all humanity—Helen—abandoning her husband, the . . . , went sailing to Troy and took no thought for child or dear parents, but beguiled . . . herself. . . , for . . . lightly . . . reminds me now of

Anactoria

absent: whose lovely step and shining glance of face I would prefer to see than Lydians' chariots and fighting men in arms . . .

Like fragment 31, on the surface fragment 16 too begins with a strict bifurcation: two women in two different and separate roles. On one level, it is possible to claim a clear division between subject and object of desire, between the gazing narrative "I" and Anactoria, most beautiful to look upon. And yet, even in this

relationship, one finds it difficult to pigeonhole the women in prefabricated categories. As one interpreter has argued, the objectification of Anactoria, at least as far as the gaze is concerned, remains ambiguous since the "I" describes her beloved not by re-creating a physical image of her, but instead conjuring up "a image of light and movement"³⁴ by recalling her walk and her "shining glance of face."

Moreover, in order to get from a very general consideration of desire in the opening priamel to a discussion of her personal desire, Sappho provides an example that serves to bridge the two. Seeking to demonstrate her proposition that one desires that which one finds most beautiful, Sappho upholds as paradigmatic the story of Helen abandoning her home, her husband, her child, and her parents in order to run off with Paris. Helen, on the one hand, appears as the one who desires. Helen, the poet says, *chooses* to sail to Troy because she has discovered that Paris, whom she desires, represents for her "the most beautiful thing on the dark earth."³⁵ But Sappho does not portray Helen *only* as subject. In an innovative move, the poet celebrates Helen simultaneously as one who is desired; for she is exquisitely beautiful herself. Sappho describes Helen as "preeminent in beauty (κάλλος, 7) of all humanity," thus linguistically linking her to that which one desires, whatever is "the most beautiful thing" (καλλιστον, 3).³⁶ Indeed, Helen represents the object of desire *par excellence* for so many men—Paris, her husband, the Greek army, the Trojan elders. Sappho stakes out, via the example of Helen, a strong and striking claim for women in the realm of desire. In Helen's case, the poet seems to refuse to distinguish between subject and object of desire, insisting that some women can be simultaneously both. This stands at odds with the alternative construction of women she offers through the poetic "I" and her desire for Anactoria, where each woman has but one position. As a whole, this fragment offers, in rapid succession, three separate and equally viable possibilities for women in an erotic relationship, either heterosexual or homoerotic. Women, Sappho's poems claim, are many things, appear in multiple guises. Unlike the Ovidian heroines, Sapphic women are in no way limited as to the manifestations in which they cloak themselves. Sappho refuses to fashion Woman.

Poem 1, probably the only complete poem that remains to us, contains an invocation to Aphrodite, a plea for aid in the erotic domain. On examination, this poem too highlights the multifarious nature of women in the realm of desire:

Intricate, undying Aphrodite, snare-weaver, child of Zeus, I pray thee, do not tame my spirit, great lady, with pain and sorrow. But come to me now if ever before you heard my voice from afar and leaving your father's house, yoked golden chariot and came. Beautiful sparrows swiftly

brought you

to the murky ground with a quick flutter of wings from the sky's height through clean air. They were quick in coming. You, blessed goddess, a smile on your divine face, asked what did I suffer, this time again, and why did I call, this time again, and what did I in my frenzied heart most want to happen. Whom am I to persuade, this time again . . . to lead to your affection? Who, o Sappho, does you wrong? For one who flees will

soon pursue, one who rejects gifts will soon be making offers, and one who

does not love will soon be loving, even against her will. Come to me even now

release me from these mean anxieties, and do what my heart wants done, you yourself be my ally.

Sappho pursues a woman, bearing gifts and love, but the woman shuns her passion. Again Sappho portrays her character as a desiring subject, even if unsuccessful in the pursuit of the desired object. And yet, to call the other woman simply the object of Sappho's passion does not sufficiently describe the various possible manifestations this poem offers to her, most of all through ambiguity. When Aphrodite promises that the woman who is pursued will pursue, the lack of a clearly expressed direct object in the Greek text fuels controversy over the nature of the goddess' intervention. Whom will the woman pursue; whom will she love in time? Does the goddess pledge to uphold "the universal law of justice on which lovers can rely?"³⁷ Revenge will be sweet when, with the passage of years, the beloved grows too old to remain the object of desire and must then become the spurned lover of some other (as yet unspecified) young, fleeing beloved.³⁸ According to this argument the woman currently appears as the object of desire. Yet she will not remain frozen in this manifestation. She

will, in time, become the subject in another relationship as intimacy between women resembles the asymmetrical model of desire recognizable from male pederastic relationships as well as relationships of a heterosexual nature.³⁹

Another interpretation of this fragment, equally viable, provides the woman Sappho desires with an alternative role. Although desired, she is not confined to a passive part. On the contrary, she remains throughout quite emphatically the subject of all the actions she performs; she "flees," "rejects gifts," and "does not love." In addition, Aphrodite asks Sappho explicitly: "whom am I to persuade this time again . . . to lead to your affection," indicating her (weary) willingness to persuade the woman to love Sappho.⁴⁰ The lack of a specific direct object when the goddess promises that the one who does not love will love invites the possibility that desire in this fragment exists only between two subjects; or, as one interpreter concludes: "the speaker is describing, in general terms, the reciprocal movements of desire in which she and her beloved both participate in the process of giving and receiving, loving and being loved—a process that, according to the grammar of the poem, involves *only* subjects."⁴¹

Similarly, fragment 94 encourages a variety of readings that highlight women's multiplicity:

. . . Without guile I wish to die. She left me weeping copiously and said, "Alas, what fearful things we have undergone, Sappho; truly I leave you against my will." But I replied to her, "Farewell, be happy as you go and remember me, for you know how we have stood by you. Perhaps you don't so I will remind you . . . and we have undergone beautiful things. With many garlands of violets and roses . . . together, and . . . you put around yourself, at my side, and flowers wreathed around your soft neck with rising fragrance, and . . . you stroked the oil distilled from royal cherry blossoms and on tender bedding you reached the end of longing . . . of soft . . . and there was no . . . nor sacred . . . from which we held back, nor grove . . . sound . . ."

This poem makes a nice companion piece to fragment 96,⁴² since both focus on women who, like Helen, simultaneously desire and are desirable/desired. And yet, on closer consideration, they do not really resemble Helen either. Each woman in each poem

appears unique. Fragment 96 features two separated lovers. Both women are portrayed dually, both as subjects and objects of desire. Atthis longs for a woman now in Lydia whose beauty and desirability emerge tangibly for the reader. And yet, the woman is not merely the object of desire (Atthis's?, the reader's?, the narrator's?); in turn she develops into a desiring subject. The narrator also remembers the same woman's reciprocal desire for Atthis (lines 15–16), in whose singing she took special pleasure (line 5). Atthis too, then, appears in multiple roles.⁴³

Fragment 94 likewise signals the difficulty of pinning women down in Sappho's poetry. As Sappho reminds the woman who departs unwillingly of the delightful moments they have shared, the poetic voice seems to locate its focus on the "sensuousness" of the woman.⁴⁴ While the narrative "I" alludes to her own presence within the scene she describes, she re-creates the relationship for the woman by describing, so far as we can tell, only the woman's activities. In the process she presents the woman as extremely desirable, both to herself and to the reader. But the woman does not merely emerge from the text as the object of the gaze and of desire; she also appears as desiring at the very moment Sappho most objectifies her. Voluptuously, even seductively, adorning herself, she satisfies her desire.

Or does she? The fragmentary condition of the text complicates the interpretation in a way that nicely complements the ambiguity and multiplicity already present in Sappho's poetry. In the moment of consummation, "you reached the end of longing" (ἐξίης πόθο[ν]), indeterminacy emerges. There appears no specification as to whose desire achieves satisfaction. Her own? Someone else's? Subject or object? All of the above? Perhaps, in fact, according to one interpretation, the text depicts a non-hierarchical distinction between the two participants in an erotic relationship by hinting at a fusion between self and other. It is even possible that in a fully extant text the poem would offer no clarification as to whose desire gets satiated, since no differentiation is required in the case of mutual desire.⁴⁵ Indeed the entire fragment demonstrates the way in which the poet imagines the two women so that they become one, undistinguished from one another. Throughout the poem she describes another woman and does not ascribe any activities to herself that would allow her a separate and distinct role. Nevertheless her presence, constantly recalled through her

use of the first-person plural, ensures that the fragment unveils "the perfect moment of emotional fusing with another."⁴⁶ Sappho does not feel a strong and compelling need to demarcate the boundaries between the two women, to divide the two of them into an "I" and a "you," into a subject and an object. The narrator's lack of distinction between herself and the other woman makes them simultaneously both as well as neither.⁴⁷

Moreover, the heterogeneity and the blurring of boundaries that characterizes the construction of women spills over into the various ways that the poet depicts their desire(s). Although a prominent French feminist, Luce Irigaray, theorizing a feminine desire beyond the bounds of masculine fantasy, insists that touch and not gaze stimulates female pleasure,⁴⁸ fragment 31 refuses this single definition for women's passion, revealing instead the multiplicity of senses involved both in the production and in the experience of the erotic moment. Desire emerges from an interplay of the various senses, and, as other fragments reveal,⁴⁹ in a variety of different combinations. The striking description of the female narrator's sense of self-fragmentation into various, non-functioning body parts occurs, she insists, "as I look briefly at you." The specular, thus, does indeed arouse desire. At the same time, however, Sappho imagines other reasons for feeling overwhelming passion; the aural pleasure of the woman's voice and her laugh join with her beauty in unleashing the passion of the feminine narrator.⁵⁰ Moreover, while, on the one hand, the various senses stimulate her desire, simultaneously this desire manifests itself in the effects it produces on the body's various sensory organs. She cannot hear, or speak, or see. A fire (10) and a cold sweat (perhaps, 13) mingle to produce sensation in her flesh.

While the physical presence of the woman in fragment 31 elicits desire, fragments 94 and 96 show that Sappho's portrayal of desire, like her depiction of women, does not follow a single pattern. A second way in which Sappho highlights the multifaceted nature of desire is by showing, through a dissolution of boundaries between absence and presence, that presence is not always a prerequisite for desire. In fragments 94 and 96 Sappho creates a striking fusion between past and present, presence and absence, thus demonstrating how memory combats absence.⁵¹ Physical separation often threatens to destroy the erotic bond between

two women in the Sapphic text. But desire, Sappho argues, does not always necessitate the actual, physical proximity of two lovers. Absence or physical separation cannot sunder the bond between two women who have the ability to re-create their desire through the use of memory. In fragment 94, the woman has unwillingly left Sappho, but the text does not focus on women lamenting their erotic abandonment. Instead, Sappho urges her lover to make use of memory to re-create the scenes of their shared moments. She banishes overtones of sorrow and focuses only on the idea that to remember sensuous erotic pleasures is to enter again into the erotic bond that distance and absence cannot erase. In fragment 96 two women appear in a moonlight setting. Atthis thinks about an absent woman who in turn longs for Atthis. In this moonlight, the two lovers, although physically separated by geographical distance, achieve some sort of satisfaction in their desire, some manner of closeness through a union in a common solitude. Each woman remembers the other.⁵² To remember, for Sappho, becomes to preserve an indestructible memory that brings a form of happiness and rekindles desire.⁵³

I want to conclude with a word on men and the role that they play in Sappho's construction of women and their desire(s). This is a much-contested problem in the scholarship on, as well as the translations and various re-appropriations of, Sappho and her fragments. I begin with the question of the man's identity and the extent of his importance in fragment 31. Scholars like Denys Page and George Devereux insist that the poem turns on the role of the man. In Devereux's opinion, Sappho, as a lesbian, suffers violent penis envy when faced with the fact that she cannot possibly give to her partner what a male lover can.⁵⁴ Alternatively, in Page's opinion, Sappho experiences overwhelming jealousy that the girl prefers the man to the poet.⁵⁵ But other scholars note that Sappho's exact choice of words precludes the existence of a tangible man, actually sitting across from the beloved woman at a specific moment. Although the poem opens with a pointed reference to "that man" (κῆνός, 1) the indefinite "whosoever" (ὅστις, 2) almost immediately undermines the sense of specificity.⁵⁶ The effect is to remove focus and significance from the man.⁵⁷ Similarly the subjunctive, ὡς ἴδω (literally, "whenever I look," 7) undercuts the possibility that Sappho is thinking about a specific

occurrence. The subjunctive creates the scene as if it were an indefinite and constantly recurring temporal illusion.⁵⁸ Again this reinforces the notion that no specific man exists and that he fulfills no important function in the poem. Sappho does not recall an identifiable event at which a man was present, but rather she opens the poem by introducing the possibility of a male presence that she subsequently erodes. As the fragment unfolds, she excludes the man from the realm of feminine homoerotics and concentrates instead on the often-repeated illusion of looking upon the woman. This strategy of briefly introducing yet thereafter erasing "that man," a move mirrored in the swift movement from *κῆρυς* to *ῥῆτις*, serves to demarcate the world of feminine desire and to regulate those who might seek to penetrate it.⁵⁹

Yet, as we have seen in Sappho's poetry, nothing remains so clear-cut, so simple, so uniform. While fragment 31 suggests man's lack of importance in the realm of women and their desire(s), other fragments offer alternative possibilities. Fragment 16 centers on the story of Helen. Even as Sappho strikingly creates for us a Helen who appears as the subject of desire as she chooses to run off with Paris, one cannot help but remember the epic versions of her story, along with Sappho's revised version.⁶⁰ Men, then, play a rather significant role in this poem, even as we focus on Helen. Her desire is for a man, for Paris. Moreover, when she receives the appellation "preeminent in beauty," we recall the Homeric telling of the story in which her striking appearance made her the object of a great deal of masculine desire. In addition, fragments 94 and 96 similarly allow for the interpretive possibility that men have important roles to play even though they do not explicitly appear in the text. While certainly the spotlight in both poems remains on the complex portrayals of the women, one cannot help but consider that the relationships between women have come to an end, in all likelihood, because of one woman's marriage to a man.⁶¹ Men too, in Sappho's world, play multiple, shifting roles, significant as well as excluded, sometimes, as in the case of fragments 94 and 96, within the movement of the very same poem.

Feminist readings of Sappho's fragmentary text, then, offer compelling possibilities about the way in which one might construct images of women and feminine desire from these poems.

Further, viewing these possibilities through a Lacanian lens, we can observe that Sappho, in a manner contrary to what we have noted in the *Heroides*, refuses to create Woman according to a fantasy or illusion of oneness. Sappho, unlike Ovid, does not reduce women to a single definition but rather celebrates their multiple and diverse configurations through the female characters she creates, as well as by the settings in which she places them, and the multifarious nature of the production and experience of their desire(s). Let us turn now to consider what happens to the Greek poet at the hands of Ovid, to examine in detail how the Ovidian Sappho represents herself in *Heroides* 15.

Women and the Woman: When Ovid Meets Sappho

Ovid's Sappho diverges from her "source text," rewriting through both echoes and travesties of the Sapphic fragments the possibilities feminist readings discover in Sappho's own poetry. Ovid's Sappho loudly proclaims that she is no longer a lesbian. Forcefully repudiating the homoerotic desire of Sapphic verse and embracing heterosexuality instead, the Ovidian Sappho takes on the same sexual orientation as the other heroines in the *Heroides*. The insistence on her tremendous passion for Phaon constitutes an important way in which the Ovidian Sappho renounces the Greek original; for in her choice of a heterosexual desire in *Heroides* 15, she must belittle and deny the homoerotic passion of Sappho's poetry. As she rejects her former lesbian love(s), she equally relinquishes the rich variety of characteristics the Sapphic fragments attribute to this love and to those who participate in it. In her effort to disavow her former homoerotic desire the Ovidian Sappho adopts a twofold strategy. On the one hand, she struggles to emphasize how little she currently feels for her former lovers, and on the other, she strives to erase any imputation of strength and genuineness to her lesbian passion by stressing the great number of her past lovers. How could she ever have experienced deep and abiding passion when a hoard of beloveds suggests erotic transience?⁶²

Selecting beloveds tenderly described in Sapphic verse, the Ovidian Sappho makes a clear point of distancing herself from

them. She denies that they possess any present worth or desirability, dismissively asserting: *vilis Anactorie, vilis mihi candida Cydro, / non oculis grata est Atthis, ut ante, meis*⁶³ ("Anactoria is contemptible in my opinion, and so too is fair Cydro. Atthis is not pleasing to my eyes as she was before," 17–18).⁶⁴ Moreover, similarly highlighting her change in sexual orientation, she announces that the women from Lesbos no longer captivate her (15–16). In fact, although they were once the subjects and the audience for her songs, now she repudiates them in both capacities:

Lesbides aequoreae, nupturaque nuptaque proles,
 Lesbides, Aeolia nomina dicta lyra,
 Lesbides, infamem quae me fecistis amatae,
 desinite ad citharas turba venire meas! (199–202)

[Lesbian women born of the water, about to wed, and already married, Lesbian women, names sung by my Aeolian lyre, Lesbian women, you who have made me infamous because I loved you, cease to come *en masse* to my lyre.]

Not only does she play down the former importance of her lesbian lovers, but she adopts a striking tone of moral disapproval toward her lesbian desire. At line 201, she states that her desire has rendered her "infamous," suggesting that in her Ovidian incarnation she finds something reproachful in homoerotic passion. Indeed, it is tempting to consider that, in fact, line 201 represents the second time in her epistle she strives to utter some form of moral pronouncement on her former sexual orientation. This possibility requires accepting the reading that Knox selects in his edition of the *Heroides*. At line 19, the Ovidian Sappho modifies her former (female) lovers with a clause that has two alternate manuscript readings: either *quas hic sine crimine amavi* ("whom I loved *here* without reproach") or *quas non sine crimine amavi* ("whom I loved not without reproach"). Should we read *non* with Knox, rather than *hic*, then the Ovidian heroine, near the beginning and again near the closing of her letter, claims something shameful in desire as it appears in her "source text."⁶⁵ Moreover, stylistically, at the very moment she casts off the lesbianism present in Sapphic verse, she employs a three-fold repetition of *Lesbides*, a poetic structure that features in Greek lyric poetry in general, and in Sappho's own verse in particular.⁶⁶

Self-consciously referring to, and echoing, Sappho, thereby calling special attention to the act, she rejects the prior *persona*.

At the same time, the Ovidian Sappho tries to play down the importance of her previous passion by repeatedly fostering the impression that she loved an incredible number of women. Referring to those who once pleased her in a hyperbolic plural as *Pyrriades Methymniadesve puellae* ("maidens of Pyrrha and of Methymnia," 15), *Lesbiadum turba* ("crowd of Lesbian women," 16) and *aliae centum* ("the other hundred women," 19), she suggests that she has never experienced a real and lasting love. Moreover, by repudiating and belittling her past homoerotic desire at every turn she elevates her feelings for Phaon, her one and only true love. While innumerable women once provoked her affections, now he alone captures her heart—*improbe, multarum quod fuit, unus habes* ("wicked man, you alone have what once belonged to many women," 20). She further stresses his unique status when she explains that in his absence she can no longer compose poetry because *vacuae carmina mentis opus* ("poetry is the product of a mind that is free of cares," 14). Fragments 16 and 94, however, certainly *carmina* ("poetry"), comment on absence and a moment of departure respectively, and provide a sharp contrast to the sentiments expressed by the Ovidian Sappho. Once again the Ovidian heroine alters her "source text"; the cares of losing a *female* lover do not silence poetic creativity in the Greek fragments.

Ovid does not invent the heterosexual Sappho; as we noted above, her story belongs to a lively comic tradition about the poet.⁶⁷ And yet, if he borrows from Greek comedy the outlines of her character, an older woman nursing an unrequited passion for a beautiful youth, he actively reshapes her, through an intertextual dialogue with Sappho's own poetry, into a heterosexual Sappho of his own creation, very much specific to the *Heroides*. Ovid's Sappho removes the potential for women's multiplicity we have seen in the Sapphic fragments, rendering herself, in sharp contrast to her "source text," an exact replica of the other abandoned women in the *Heroides*. In the collection's final epistle the repetitive and limited nature of the Ovidian heroine, the universalization of Woman that occurs throughout the *Heroides*, comes into clear focus.

The Ovidian Sappho takes up her stylus when she realizes that Phaon has abandoned her. She wants desperately to remain

the object of his desire and has many strategies up her sleeve for obtaining what she desires. Like the other heroines of Ovid's collection, she strikingly pursues her goal through rhetorical self-manipulation. We shall see that a profound doubleness marks her self-presentation. As the other heroines did before her, the Ovidian Sappho constructs a self-portrait predicated at its center upon an irreconcilable split. In fact, she manipulates two separate methods for double self-representation, drawing together both the strategy of self-bifurcation employed by Dido, Ariadne, and Phyllis, as well as a version of the somewhat altered strategy to which Medea and Hypsipyle have recourse. The Lacanian concept of Imaginary identification casts light on the ways in which Sappho portrays herself for Phaon, both when she, like Jason's two jilted lovers, seeks to create resemblances as well as profound differences between herself and the current object(s) of Phaon's desire, and when, echoing Dido, Ariadne, and Phyllis, she manipulates the narcissistic aspects of masculine desire to construct her self-portrait. Like the other heroines who precede her in the collection, she imagines herself as a powerful woman, while concurrently fashioning herself as helpless and vulnerable.

Like Medea and Hypsipyle before her,⁶⁸ motivated by the structure of her feminine desire, the Ovidian Sappho constructs herself in a relationship of identification with other women whom she views as rival objects potentially capable of arousing Phaon's desire. The Ovidian Sappho first seeks to enhance her own desirability in Phaon's eyes by likening herself to the current objects of his desire, or at least to her fantasized projections of them. Phaon has traveled to Sicily and has not returned. She conjectures that Phaon does not come back because he has found an abundance of new lovers. In response to her imaginings, the Ovidian Sappho attempts to identify herself with these new women. If he now desires Sicilian women, if they now hold powerful places in his imagination, she will turn herself into one. She first indicates her longing to metamorphose into her own fictional formulation of her rivals by expressing a direct wish for a wholesale exchange of nationalities: *nunc tibi Sicelides veniunt, nova praeda, puellae. / quid mihi cum Lesbo? Sicelis esse volo* ("Now the Sicilian girls come to you as fresh prey. What use does Lesbos have for me? I want to be Sicilian," 51–52). Since she realizes that

there is little chance that she will actually become Sicilian, however, she conceives of a more realizable way in which to create herself in the guise of Phaon's putative new lovers. She issues a warning to the women of Sicily: *nec vos decipiant blandae mendacia linguae: / quae vobis dicit, dixerat ante mihi* ("Do not let the lies of a flattering tongue deceive you. The things that he now says to you, he had said before to me," 55–56). In a line that reflects the mirroring she seeks, she posits that he has already uttered to her the lies he currently uses on the Sicilian women.⁶⁹

She does not, however, issue these cautionary words for the benefit of her imagined rivals. Her admonitions serve to create a distance between herself and them, one that subtly suggests her own greater power. Indeed, as Lacan argues, Imaginary identification leads the subject both to assert her similarity to the mirror-image and to find ways by which to separate herself from it. Claiming that Phaon attempts to seduce the Sicilian women with recycled lies that he initially invented to court Sappho, she carefully differentiates herself from her rivals to their disadvantage. They remain mere copies of her; she constructs herself as the original. Moreover, the Ovidian Sappho also draws a second distinction between herself and the new women in Phaon's life. While he once loved her alone, now he dallies with many. And, as we have just observed, the Ovidian Sappho, in attempting to make light of her former lesbian passion, established the equation that many lovers suggests transient passion while one lover signifies true desire. Whether she presents herself as equivalent to these women or as distinct from them, her goal remains the same. She employs both self-constructions as the means by which to demonstrate to Phaon her own desirability.

Although she briefly manipulates the strategy that Medea and Hypsipyle pursue, the Ovidian Sappho prefers the twofold self-constructions that Dido, Ariadne, and Phyllis employ. In fact, in some ways, as we shall see, the Ovidian Sappho most resembles Ariadne. Still striving, according to the structure of feminine desire, to present herself as desirable to Phaon, she manipulates to her full advantage the narcissistic aspects of masculine desire in service of her goal. The Ovidian Sappho employs a second version of Imaginary identification creating herself now according to *Phaon's* requirements for the other in the mirror. On the one

hand, the Ovidian Sappho portrays herself to Phaon as powerful, even equivalent to gods, offering a self-representation that allows him to consider her the (idealized) mirror-image of himself. On the other hand, she simultaneously and irreconcilably depicts herself as helpless. This second self-portrait, like the first, also encourages Phaon to feel, and even revel in, his own potency. As we noted in chapter 2, the mirror-image, according to Lacan, inspires a double response of adoration and of aggression. One loves the mirror-image imagined in an idealized fashion so that it reflects back an idealized vision of the self. And yet problems arise when the mirroring occurs. Feelings of jealousy for, and rivalry with, the other who, as a double, threatens one's sense of place in the world prods one to differentiate oneself from one's image. Conjuring herself up as helpless, the Ovidian Sappho provides the hero with an image from which to distance himself, in the process granting Phaon a larger-than-life reflection of his own power.

While many other heroines in the collection create narratives that highlight the political power they wield and the desirable social status they possess, Sappho cannot share in their proud claims to royalty and sovereignty. Nevertheless, she creates herself as powerful by suggesting to Phaon that her considerable poetic talent sets her apart from the ordinary mortal woman. The Ovidian Sappho claims divine status; her poetry opens up the path to immortality. Twice she refers to herself as *vates*, a poet who enjoys a close connection to the gods (lines 58 and 205). Further, she claims that her voice utters verse inspired by the Muses, and the divine quality of her song brings her global renown: *at mihi Pegasides blandissima carmina dictant, / iam canitur toto nomen in orbe meum* ("but the Muses dictate the sweetest songs to me; already my name is sung throughout the whole world," 27–28). She underscores her assertion when she reiterates later that not only does her popularity on Lesbos know no bounds, as indicated by the throngs of women who gather to hear her poetry (lines 199–202), but even more significantly, the farthest reaches of the world sing her name. She boasts: *sum brevis, at nomen, quod terras impleat omnes, / est mihi; mensuram nominis ipsa fero* ("I am short, but I have a name that fills every land. My stature is equal to my fame," 33–34). Her vatic stance and her claims to a fame that already does, and will continue to, exceed

her person in time and in space make up traditional declarations of poetic immortality.⁷⁰

She takes the comparison between herself and the divine one step further. The Greek lyric of Sappho that the Ovidian Sappho claims as her own offers the heroine the opportunity to compare herself to Apollo, a recurring presence throughout the epistle, and to find herself equal to the association.⁷¹ Forlorn because Phaon has abandoned her, she wanders through the woods. A Naiad appears and suggests that she purge herself of her passion by leaping from the Leucadian cliffs. Sappho imagines the final epitaph she would compose for herself. The words Sappho chooses for her tombstone sharply diverge from the self-negating epitaphs that Phyllis and Dido invent.⁷² Deciding upon the distich *grata lyram posui tibi Phoebe poetria Sappho / convenit illa mihi convenit illa tibi* ("I, the pleasing poet Sappho, dedicated my lyre to you Phoebus—it suits me, it suits you too," 183–84), she reveals the status and importance she imputes to herself. In the final analysis she represents herself as a *poetria* and a good one too, a mirror to Apollo. The same lyre suits them both in a verse that draws attention to their similarities; the half of the pentameter concerning Apollo echoes the half concerning Sappho.

The comparison takes the reader by surprise. Perhaps it is not unusual for a poet to make a claim for immortality through verse, but it is somewhat odd for Sappho to choose Apollo as her divine equivalent. Although the god of music and poetry, and, in this sense, a good choice, Apollo is a male divinity and therefore a questionable counterpart to Sappho. We must ask, then, why the Ovidian Sappho opts for the comparison. The answer lies in how she portrays Phaon. While many interpreters of *Heroides* 15 assign a negligible role to Phaon, young and beautiful but otherwise a nondescript participant in Sappho's story, I would argue that the Ovidian Sappho offers him an image of himself as powerful, and more precisely, as godlike.⁷³

Throughout the epistle, and in a variety of different ways, she suggests that Phaon has something of the divine about him. Thus, her self-portrait as immortal and like Apollo, a god to whom she specifically compares Phaon, is one of the strategies she employs to highlight her lover's power. As a god and as a male god in particular, she fashions herself for Phaon as an idealized version of himself; for she simultaneously exalts Phaon as a male god. First

she stresses his godlike stature by concentrating on his appearance. She asserts that one easily mistakes Phaon for a god; just affix onto his body the attributes of any (young, virile, handsome) divinity and he will confound the viewer's ability to distinguish. She exclaims: *sume fidem et pharetram: fies manifestus Apollo. / accedant capiti cornua: Bacchus eris* ("Take up a lyre and a quiver—you will become Apollo in the flesh. Let horns be added to your head—you will be Bacchus," 23–24). According to her representations not only she, but he too resembles Apollo, the one in musical talent, the other in looks.⁷⁴

Moreover, Howard Jacobson suggests that the Ovidian Sappho's obsession with Phaon's godlike beauty "has every appearance of being an exaggerated parody of Sappho's affection for comparing young men to mythical heroes."⁷⁵ Let us pursue his point. What do these references to Sappho's poetry add to a consideration of the way in which the Ovidian Sappho portrays Phaon? The Sapphic lyrics that pertain directly to men are few, but in the *epithalamia* young men play important roles. The Ovidian Sappho portrays her lover in the manner of the bridegroom of Sapphic verse at the moment of his nuptials. The Greek poet compares the groom to "a slender sapling," (fragment 115, line 2), young, beautiful, still fragile. By means of striking images, the Ovidian Sappho portrays Phaon at a similar stage of life: *o nec adhuc iuvenis, nec iam puer, utilis aetas* ("not yet a youth, no longer a boy—the perfect age," 93), and *quid mirum, si me primae lanuginis aetas / abstulit, atque anni quos vir amare potest?* ("why is it a cause for wonder if the stage when the first down appears on the cheek consumed me, and the age that a man is able to love?" 85–86). Further, Sappho compares the groom at the peak of his beauty to a god. The physical appearance of the groom, who is "much larger than a large man" (fragment 111, line 6) leads Sappho to see in him traces of Ares.⁷⁶ Similarly, when she envisions the mythical union of Hector and Andromache, she describes both the bride and groom as "like the gods," (fragment 44, line 34). By conjuring up the Sapphic *epithalamia* in her descriptions of Phaon, the Ovidian Sappho constructs her lover as a divine bridegroom.⁷⁷

The Ovidian Sappho reveals a third, even subtler, way to fashion Phaon as a divinity. She describes a *locus amoenus* ("charming/pleasant spot"), a forest with caves, hidden from view by lush foliage, alive with the sound of birds, a grassy place (141ff).

She portrays her surroundings in a manner reminiscent of pastoral poetry.⁷⁸ The Ovidian Sappho then personifies this landscape, noting nature's reactions to the departure of Phaon. Nature too, it seems, feels passion for her lover; indeed, now that he has gone *quin etiam rami positis lugere videntur / frondibus, et nullae dulce queruntur aves* ("even the branches seem to grieve when their leaves have fallen and no birds sweetly lament," 151–52). Here again she evokes pastoral poetry where one finds similar examples of nature's grief over human loss.⁷⁹ Daphnis springs to mind as the most famous lost beloved within the pastoral genre for whom nature laments in a stunning display of pathetic fallacy; both Theocritus and Virgil recount the mournful response of flora and fauna to the death of the young Daphnis.⁸⁰ In *Eclogue* 5, moreover, not only does the beautiful young boy achieve a more-than-mortal stature by virtue of the tears that the landscape and its animal inhabitants shed for him, but nature announces to the pastoral world that an apotheosis has occurred:

ipsi laetitia voces ad sidera iactant
intensi montes; ipsae iam carmina rupes,
ipsa sonant arbusta: "deus, deus ille, Menalca!"⁸¹

[The leafy mountains themselves cast up their voices to the stars in their joy; the very cliffs and the shrubs themselves sound out in song: "Menalcas, he (Daphnis) is a god, a god!"]

Indeed, as far as the farmers and herdsmen are concerned, Daphnis becomes a god comparable to Ceres and to Bacchus—*ut Baccho Cererique, tibi sic vota quotannis / agricolae facient: damnabis tu quoque votis* ("as they do to Bacchus and to Ceres, so the farmers will make yearly votive offerings to you; you too will condemn them to fulfill their vows").⁸² When the Ovidian Sappho evokes Daphnis with her description of Phaon, she ascribes once again, this time by means of intertextual allusion, aspects of divinity to her departed lover.⁸³

Parallel to the strand of self-depiction that reveals a powerful, divine Sappho, idealized mirror-image of an idealized Phaon, a second and conflicting self-characterization also emerges. Presenting herself as Phaon's mirror-image, she knows that she must also alleviate the hostility he will inevitably feel toward her. To

this end she proffers herself as helpless and vulnerable. Like the first self-portrayal, the second strategy of self-representation serves to elevate Phaon who appears, in directly proportional fashion, more central and powerful the more the Ovidian Sappho emphasizes her own powerlessness. Her strategy revolves around several key points, a manipulation of the gaze, a denial of her control over her own poetic talent, and the refusal to grant memory a place in desire. In each case she achieves her goal through travesties of Sapphic verse.

On the one hand, when she claims that her exalted poetic stature augments her desirability, it seems that perhaps the Ovidian Sappho will follow the lead of the Greek poet, and expand the stimuli of desire to include the aural as well as the physical. She sets forth her poetic genius as an alternative manifestation of beauty that vies with physical attractiveness (lines 27ff). Although she admits that her appearance is homely, she asserts that her creative outpourings counterbalance, or more strongly, erase, her ugliness, insisting to Phaon with a forceful claim: *si mihi difficilis formam natura negavit, / ingenio formae damna rependo meae* ("if troublesome nature has denied me beauty, with my talent I compensate for the loss of beauty," 31–32). She replaces her physical appearance with the beauty of her poetic creativity and suggests—in the manner of Sappho's fragment 31, in which the passion of the poetic "I" is unleashed when she hears the beloved's "sweet speech and desirable laughter,"—that desire can be aroused by more than just the visual.

The remainder of her epistle, however, reveals an all-encompassing primacy granted to the gaze, more specifically, to Phaon's gaze. Although it seems that the Ovidian Sappho spends a considerable amount of time contemplating the beauty of Phaon, in fact her more frequent, and more violent, attempts to render herself as spectacle significantly undermine her role as wielder of the gaze. Just as Ariadne on her deserted island chose to manipulate the gaze, thus offering to the departed Theseus the powerful role of one who actively looks and to herself the more passive role of object to be seen, so the Ovidian Sappho deploys a comparable strategy for self-depiction.⁸⁴ Indeed, the Ovidian Sappho highlights her similarity to Ariadne with a direct reminiscence of *Heroides* 10. She conjures up for Phaon a picture of herself returning to the place where they used to make love. As

Ariadne offered Theseus a vivid description of herself hysterically throwing her body about the bed they once shared (10.53–55), so too Sappho carefully draws for Phaon the image of herself rolling around on the grass and watering the turf with her tears (147–50).⁸⁵ Moreover, the Ovidian Sappho draws attention to her self-construction as object of the gaze through pointed echoes of the Sapphic fragments.

In one breath Ovid's Sappho attempts to temper the importance of attractiveness, causing us to recall that in the Greek "source text"—fragments 16, 31, 94, and 96, for example—the visual does not arouse desire in isolation from the other senses. And yet, beauty remains the Ovidian heroine's primary topic of concern. As we have seen, she focuses on Phaon's striking beauty to create a version of her lover equivalent to the quasi-divine image she projects of herself. She also, however, manipulates his beauty to fashion herself as his antithesis; if he is extraordinarily handsome, when she turns the mirror to herself, she offers a physical self-description that pointedly clashes with the rapturous lines that convey Phaon's godlike beauty. Although she does promote her ability to compose exquisite verse as an alternative form of attractiveness, simultaneously she chooses to depict herself as physically less than desirable. She composes a portrait in three distichs. Although it goes on to claim that her appearance remains of no consequence, each couplet opens by calling attention to the fact that she lacks traditional good looks. Indeed, she highlights her homeliness by pointedly referring to it three times in the space of five lines: *si mihi difficilis formam natura negavit* ("if troublesome nature has denied me beauty," 31), *sum brevis* ("I am short," 33), *candida si non sum* ("if I am not fair," 35). In the case of *sum brevis* the shortness of the sentence mirrors the thought it conveys and thus draws added attention to itself.⁸⁶

Despite her self-deprecating descriptions, for the greatest portion of the epistle, and in many astonishing ways, the heroine of *Heroides* 15 carefully, methodically, and steadfastly turns the gaze in on herself.⁸⁷ Like Ariadne,⁸⁸ Sappho grasps the gaze's potential to kindle masculine passion; she understands that the power Phaon acquires *qua* viewing subject provides a strong stimulus to desire. By depicting herself as object, and more, as helpless and vulnerable object, Sappho grants the power of the gaze to Phaon. She claims that in his absence she finds herself unable, or

unwilling, to enhance her appearance with traditional accouterments. Under this rubric she manages to present a very detailed visual picture of herself. No longer does she wear perfume or jewelry or attractive clothing; no longer does she arrange her hair neatly or bother to set off her hairstyle with gold (73–76).⁸⁹ Her deliberate self-depiction serves a twofold purpose. The images she draws invite Phaon to gaze upon her, to visualize her in her present pitiful state; for the more pitiful she renders herself, the more power he gains simply by being the one responsible for her condition. Because she lingers over her former toilette in detail, however, she helps him to call to his mind's eye each aspect of the way she used to beautify herself thus allowing him to conjure her up as a pleasing, yet still passive, erotic object. Through her self-imposed objectification she presents herself as powerless and passive while conversely attributing activity and power of the gaze to Phaon. In a final touch, she assures Phaon that should he return, he would not have to endure her in her present state of disarray. The rhetorical question and its answer, *cui colar infelix, aut cui placuisse laborem? / ille mei cultus unicus auctor abes* ("For whom am I, ill-stared, to adorn myself or whom am I to strive to please? You, the sole reason for my adornment, are gone," 77–78), offer the unspoken promise that she would once again strive to present herself as a pleasing visual object upon his reappearance.

Moreover, the Ovidian Sappho manipulates references to the poetry of Sappho in her quest for visual self-objectification. Fragment 94 discusses a moment of departure. As the woman leaves Sappho, the poet reminds her of the joys they once shared, drawing out in detailed fashion how the woman took pleasure in various adornments of the body. Absence in the Sapphic poem offers the excuse to relive the moments of adornment, and the Ovidian Sappho follows suit. And yet, it is the divergence from the "source text" that remains the most striking. Echoing the Sapphic fragment, yet significantly altering it, the Ovidian Sappho underscores her own vulnerability and therefore Phaon's powerful hold over her. The Sapphic fragment nowhere suggests that the separation will keep the woman from ever adorning herself again, and therefore, does not imply that the woman adorns herself simply for the viewing pleasure of the poem's speaking subject. In sharp contrast, when the Ovidian Sappho claims that Phaon's departure removes all impetus to lavish attention upon

her appearance, she depicts herself as if she could imagine no role for herself other than object of his gaze.

Let us now consider more carefully the Ovidian Sappho's self-representation in grief. In a manner reminiscent of Ariadne's self-portrait in *Heroides* 10, the Ovidian Sappho decides to sketch herself at the moment when she recognizes that Phaon has abandoned her. Briefly she allows us to question whether she will construct the scene from her point of view. She speaks of how her brother mocked her, parading back and forth before her eyes (*meos oculos*, 118). Perhaps she herself will be the seeing subject. But that perspective on events remains short-lived. She goes on to offer a brief summary of her reaction to the news of Phaon's departure: *non veniunt in idem pudor atque amor. omne videbat / vulgus* ("shame and love do not co-exist; the whole crowd saw," 121–22). Although Phaon himself is absent, she takes care to conjure herself up for him as an object of the gaze.

She begins with her initial reaction once she discovered her abandonment. Strikingly she narrates the effects on her various senses. She cannot cry, cannot speak, and a coldness grips her breast; she remains stunned and silent:

perque novem iuro, numina nostra, deas,
cum mihi nescio quis 'fugiunt tua gaudia' dixit,
nec me flere diu nec potuisse loqui.
et lacrimae deerant oculis et verba palato,
astrictum gelido frigore pectus erat. (108–12)

[When someone said to me: "Your joys are fleeing," I swear by the nine Muses, my divinities, that I was not able to weep or to speak for a long time. And tears were absent from my eyes and words from my mouth, and my breast was contracted with a cold chill.]

Sappho's fragment 31 provides the Ovidian Sappho with her material.⁹⁰ Yet she subtly alters the complicated relationship that the Greek Sappho works out between women and the gaze. While fragment 31 celebrates the multiple possibilities for women in the erotic moment as the one looking, through her self-depiction, also renders herself simultaneously object of the gaze, the Ovidian Sappho manipulates a Sapphic echo so that it becomes a way in which to close down the multiplicity available to women in

the "source text." The Ovidian heroine creates herself as pure spectacle.

Meticulously she selects an image that conveys to her reader a vivid visual impression. Tearing her hair, wailing, beating her breast (113–14), she claims to have acted *non aliter quam si nati pia mater adempti / portet ad exstructos corpus inane rogos* ("not other than if a dutiful mother were bringing to the constructed pyre the lifeless body of a son snatched from her," 115–16).⁹¹ Certainly this is a strange choice of image. Critics have tried to dismiss the moment as an intrusion of Ovidian wit that explodes the illusion that Sappho is writing and reveals Ovid's playful hand at work behind the heroine. According to this argument, Ovid, through the simile, humorously points out that the discrepancy in age between Sappho and Phaon makes him young enough to be her son.⁹² I suggest, however, that we look not at the relationship between the poet and the external reader, but rather at the effect the simile has on the way Sappho represents herself. Once again she turns her back on the possibilities for the characterization of women present in Sapphic lyric. In a tantalizingly fragmentary excerpt the Greek poet writes: "I would never suffer to share my bed with a younger man."⁹³ The speaker, a woman, seems calm, in full control of the situation, as she refuses to accept a younger man as her partner. The Ovidian Sappho, who compares her reaction to abandonment by her lover with the desperate pain of a mother who has lost a child, appears as the antithesis of the speaker in the Sapphic fragment.

Furthermore, no child—in fact, no one at all—has died, and therefore the Ovidian Sappho makes a very deliberate and conscious decision when she portrays herself as a lamenting mother. We must ask, then, why she chooses the comparison, what she achieves through this simile? The general stereotypical image of the grieving mother makes her behavior instantly and universally understandable and, more importantly, easy to conceptualize. The simile provides her with a way in which to render herself a visual spectacle. More significantly, however, it allows her to offer a very particular visual image of herself, one that is erotic in nature. She leads into her simile with yet one more vivid self-portrayal: *nec pectora plangi / nec puduit scissis exululare comis* ("I was not ashamed to beat my breast and to cry out as I tore my hair," 113–14). As she chooses the figure of a woman in mourning for her point of comparison, she conjures up an erotic image of

herself with streaming hair and naked breasts.⁹⁴ Thirty five lines later she again proffers herself as erotic object of the gaze, emphasizing her status as object with a passive verb: *illuc mentis inops, ut quam furialis Enyo / attigit, in collo crine iacente feror* ("there, devoid of sense, as one whom the frenzied Enyo has touched, I am carried away with my hair lying on my neck," 139–40).

Indeed, throughout *Heroides* 15 the Ovidian Sappho goes to great lengths to fashion herself as a visual object for Phaon's erotic pleasure. In a passage that causes translators to parade their best euphemisms and editors to excise lines as spurious, she gives a detailed account of her sexually explicit dreams. This passage too echoes and undercuts the Sapphic fragments' conception of women and their desire(s). Once again the Ovidian Sappho manipulates an allusion to her "source text" and thereby erases the multiplicity granted to women.⁹⁵ The passage calls to mind fragment 94 in its depiction of desire and its consummation. In her dreams, the Ovidian Sappho seems to mimic the multiple arousal of senses that appears in the Sapphic original where sight, smell, and touch all come into play as the woman adorns herself and satisfies desire. Once more, Phaon appears before her eyes (125) and she feels his arms around her while she in turn embraces him (127–28). She tastes his kisses (129–30) and hears the words she utters (131–32). Indeed, she summarizes, *et vigilant sensibus ora meis* ("my lips are alert to my sensations," 132). And yet, a closer glance at fragment 94 reveals how the Ovidian Sappho undercuts the very aspect of multiplicity she seems to claim for her passion. While the narrating voice in Sappho's poem focuses the departing woman's attention on the woman's *own* participation in erotic acts, the Ovidian heroine turns the spotlight, rather glaringly, on herself. The Ovidian Sappho reconfigures the eroticism of Sapphic lyric, representing herself to Phaon, rather shockingly, as sexual object.

Through her erotic dream she provides Phaon with explicit descriptions of herself in the sexual act, ending her retelling of her nocturnal exploits with the expressive climax: *ulteriora pudet narrare*,⁹⁶ *sed omnia fiunt: / et iuvat et siccae non licet esse mihi* ("It is shameful to tell the things that happen next, but all things come about. And it is pleasing, and I am not able to remain dry," 133–34).⁹⁷ Moreover, earlier in her letter, she has already written frankly about sex, more specifically, about herself in the act of intercourse. The first time she speaks about erotic activity,

she reminds Phaon of her sexual prowess as a counterbalance to her homely appearance:

haec quoque laudabas, omnique a parte placebam,
 sed tum praecipue, cum fit amoris opus.
 tum te plus solito lascivia nostra iuvabat,
 crebraque mobilitas aptaque verba ioco,
 quique, ubi iam amborum fuerat confusa voluptas,
 plurimus in lasso corpore languor erat. (45–50)

[And you used to praise these things also; I was pleasing in every aspect, but then especially when the task of love came around. Then my lasciviousness used to please you more than you were accustomed and my quick mobility, and my joking words, and the languor that was great in our tired bodies when the desire of both of us had already mingled together.]

One critic writes, “She is pathetic, if not grotesque, in her vaunted skill in sexual performance.”⁹⁸ But the vaunt of sexual proficiency serves a purpose other than to demonstrate the “grotesqueness” of the Ovidian Sappho. It also functions as another very effective way in which the heroine visually conjures herself up for Phaon as an object for his erotic pleasure.⁹⁹

And the Ovidian Sappho discovers yet more striking ways in which to underscore her own powerlessness, so that through her own self-construction she represents Phaon to himself as powerful. While, as we have seen, in one breath she celebrates her accomplishments, nevertheless she also states: *ingenio vires ille dat, ille rapit* (“he gives strength to my talent; he takes it away,” 206). The Ovidian Sappho maintains that Phaon alone is responsible for her poetic gift, thus undermining her own role in her talent. Asserting that Phaon provides the all-important inspiration, she abdicates her source of power, paradoxically employing the poetry of Sappho as her most effective tool for achieving self-abnegation. Underlining the departure from original Sapphic material in the opening lines, the Ovidian Sappho draws attention to the metrical and generic framework she has adopted for this letter:

forsitan et quare mea sint alterna requiras
 carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis.
 flendus amor meus est: elegia flebile carmen.
 non facit ad lacrimas barbitos illa meas. (5–9)

[And perhaps you seek to know why my poetry has alternating verses when I am more suited to lyric meters. My love must be wept; elegy is the weeping genre. The lyre is not suited to my tears.]

She claims that she does not consider her poetry fully her own. Phaon holds such a strong sway over her creativity that even in his absence she attributes her choice of meter, genre and subject matter to him. Because he has abandoned her, she gives up her lyric meters and begins to write erotic laments in elegiac verse.¹⁰⁰

She further emphasizes the sway Phaon holds over her, when she insists that he stands in the all-important role of arbiter of her poetic talent. Again the Ovidian Sappho perverts original Sapphic material in her efforts simultaneously to underline her own helplessness and Phaon's strength. The Greek lyrics of Sappho, even the short fragments that remain, are unique in Greek poetry. A reader would have little problem recognizing a Sapphic lyric by both its form and its content.¹⁰¹ Because the Ovidian Sappho seeks, however, to represent herself to Phaon so that through her self-construction he can see his own strength and importance, she calls into question her striking originality. She chooses to sound a note of nervousness in the very opening lines of her letter; will Phaon recognize the identity of the letter writer? Rather than confidently asserting that she, famous poet, will produce a document to which her departed lover, who used to love listening to her sing (41ff), will effortlessly attribute authorship, instead she asks a troubled series of questions:

Ecquid, ut aspecta est studiosae littera dextrae,
 protinus est oculis cognita nostra tuis?
 an, nisi legisses auctoris nomina Sapphus,
 hoc breve nescires unde veniret opus? (1-4)

[When the letters of my eager right hand were seen, straightaway were they recognized by your eyes? Or if you had not read the name of their author, Sappho, would you not know whence this brief work comes?]

Attempting to deny that her poetic originality rests with herself as poet, Ovid's Sappho makes the rather striking claim that she considers Phaon's ability to identify her work without a signature the measure by which to determine her artistic uniqueness.¹⁰²

Moreover, not only does she portray him as ultimate judge of her work, but offering him power over her one source of greatness, she attributes to him the capacity to consign her to silence. Once famous for reciting her poetry in public, she no longer composes and sings the beautiful verse that brought her fame. Ascribing her silence to the pain she feels because of Phaon's absence she explains:

. . . dolor artibus obstat
ingeniumque meis substitit omne malis.
non mihi respondent veteres in carmina vires;
pectra dolore tacent, muta dolore lyra est. (195-98)

[Pain is an impediment to the arts. All my talent came to a halt with my ills. My former capacities for poetry do not respond to my call. The plectrum is silent because of pain; my lyre is silenced by pain.]

Or again:

nec mihi, dispositis quae iungam carmina nervis,
proveniunt: vacuae carmina mentis opus. (13-14)

[nor do songs arise for me so that I may play them on my well-arranged strings; poetry is the product of a mind that is free from cares.]

She attributes to Phaon the responsibility for all that she is and, conversely, all that she is not. She insists (to him): *ingenio vires ille dat, ille rapit* ("He gives strength to my talent; he takes it away," 206), and *abstulit omne Phaon, quod vobis ante placebat* ("Phaon took away all that was pleasing to you before," 203). Asserting her own lack of power and control over her great poetic talent and achievement she offers up to her lover a tangible image of her own artistic vulnerability, and, more importantly, of his great significance to her creative act.

No striking aspect of Sapphic verse escapes the Ovidian Sappho's attempts to represent herself as powerless. While Sappho's poetry holds out the possibility of reconstituting lost love through memory, the Ovidian Sappho explicitly refuses to follow suit. For a brief moment, the Ovidian Sappho seems to champion memory's power in reproducing the pleasures of

relationship. She makes use of dreams, nocturnal representations of their past time together, as a means to bridge the distance, and therefore renew her union, with Phaon. She explains: *illic te invenio, quamvis regionibus absis* ("there I find you, however far away you are" 125), and in her dreams, *somnia formoso candidiora die* ("dreams more beautiful than a beautiful day," 124), she almost recovers a lost happiness. Yet just as memory seems to begin re-creating erotic union as it does for the separated women in fragment 96, or the departing woman and the "Sappho" character in fragment 94, the Ovidian Sappho suddenly changes her tune. She complains that the daylight destroys her nighttime union: *at cum se Titan ostendit et omnia secum, / tam cito me somnos destituisse queror* ("but when Titan reveals himself and all things with him, I complain that sleep has deserted me so quickly," 135–36). The Ovidian Sappho breaks from her "source text" to suggest that memory remains unequal to the task of re-creating past pleasures.

Moreover, the Ovidian Sappho declares that Phaon's departure compels her to shed tears. This assertion directly contradicts the response to a lover's departure that the Greek poet counsels. Fragment 96 suggests that departure should not trigger immoderate grief since the diverse nature of women's desire(s) allows both absence and presence as stimuli, thus fundamentally altering the possibility for abandonment and its lament. The exquisitely beautiful and desirable absent woman remembers Atthis, and even in Atthis' absence the woman re-creates her feeling of desire. Indeed, the Ovidian Sappho makes an allusion to fragment 96 when she recalls how Phaon once enjoyed her songs—at *me cum legeres, etiam formosa videbar; / unam iurabas usque decere loqui* ("but when you read me, I too used to seem beautiful. You used to swear that it was right for me alone to speak," 41–42). Similarly, the absent woman of fragment 96 enjoyed Atthis' song (line 5). The Ovidian Sappho, however, reformulates Sappho's use of the concepts of absence and memory. Significantly altering her "source text," she claims that Phaon will not remember her. In addition, the Ovidian Sappho reprimands Phaon because with his abandonment *nil de te mecum est nisi tantum iniuria* ("nothing of you is left with me, except only your breach of faith," 103). She closes down the variety of possible configurations open in the Sapphic text. Only presence stimulates desire; memory does not

function successfully to keep love alive. Although she admits that *meminerunt omnia amantes* ("lovers remember all things," 43), her statement represents a reproach and does not suggest that love, when it is recalled, transcends physical separation. In the process she presents herself as helpless and vulnerable, left behind and forgotten.

Finally, the Ovidian Sappho travesties the Sapphic epiphany, and again Phaon is the beneficiary of such a move. Sappho's verse develops a special relationship for women to divinity, especially to Aphrodite, who in fragment 1 emerges as the poet's past, present, and future ally in the realm of love. The Ovidian Sappho turns Venus into her competitor. Calling to the reader's mind Aphrodite's appearance to Sappho in poem 1 from the sky in a chariot drawn by sparrows (lines 9–12), the Ovidian Sappho imagines a Venus *in caelum* ("in the sky") carried *curru eburno* ("in an ivory chariot," 91). But Venus, the Ovidian Sappho claims, would only materialize to the mortal woman's great disadvantage. The Ovidian Sappho imagines the goddess descending to earth in order to snatch Phaon away and make him her lover (lines 91–92). She highlights Phaon's irresistibility, her own powerlessness.

The Ovidian Sappho experiences an actual epiphany, as well as an imagined one. She is lurking in a forest, grieving her loss. She describes caves that provide an enclosed space and the hint of coolness (141–42), and a green grove. She introduces tactile sensations when she remembers the grass on which they used to lie and through which she now runs her fingers (147–50). The nightingale sings (153–56) and a sacred fountain burbles (157–58), both introducing an aural component to the image. An *acquatica lotos* grows, adding bright colorful flowers to the scene (159).¹⁰³ The Ovidian heroine carefully crafts the landscape so that it mirrors the space the Greek poet creates for women and their desire(s) in general, and the sanctuary of Aphrodite in fragment 2 in particular.¹⁰⁴ But suddenly the Ovidian Sappho disrupts the reminiscences of Sapphic poetry pointing out that the private, feminine, world of the Greek lyrics has become the place where she and Phaon used to make love (141ff). While Sappho's fragments fashion a space in which women and their desire(s) flourish in all their multiplicity, a place that can serve, even when lovers are parted, as a *locus* to which they can retreat in memory to

re-create their passion, the Ovidian Sappho deftly dismantles the vision with her pronouncement that she finds the spot worthless without Phaon. She proclaims *at non invenio dominum silvaeque meumque. / vile solum locus est; dos erat ille loci* ("But I do not find the forest's master and mine. The place is ground of trifling value; he was the dowry of the place," 145-46). Phaon emerges as powerful, master over nature and over Sappho.

In a setting so reminiscent of the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Sappho's fragment 2, the reader expects the manifestation of the goddess herself.¹⁰⁵ Instead, a Naiad appears.¹⁰⁶ The Ovidian Sappho, who earlier represented herself as semi-divine, now depicts herself as unworthy of a powerful Olympian goddess' concern. Here, only a lowly Naiad takes any interest in her desperate plight. Aphrodite promises the Sappho character in fragment 1 at least a continuum of desire, and at best that the woman who now refuses Sappho's affections will soon pursue her with gifts of love. In sharp contrast, the Naiad contemplates the Ovidian heroine's unrequited passion and counsels suicide, or at least a leap from the Leucadian cliffs with an ambiguous outcome. Life without Phaon is not worth living. In a striking reconfiguration of the Sapphic view, the Naiad re-inforces the Ovidian Sappho's self-construction as helpless and vulnerable while testifying to Phaon's central importance. Furthermore, at the very moment she discusses the Naiad's recommendation, the heroine simultaneously proffers a powerful construction of Phaon. Returning to a way in which she represented him earlier on in her letter as god-like, she now announces to him that he would be Phoebus Apollo to her should he but return (line 188).

Conclusions

Women and their desire(s) in the Sapphic fragments differ notably from the representations of the heroines as we examined them in the first two chapters. Sappho suggests the multiplicity and diverseness both of her female characters and of the ways in which they experience and express passion. And yet, Ovid, subtly distorting the Greek verse, manages through the mouthpiece of his Sappho to reconstruct a Sappho whose desire and goals in self-portrayal replicate, reiterate those of her fourteen fellow

heroines in the epistolary collection. Joan DeJean has observed about one seventeenth-century translator of Sappho that the "ultimate goal [in this translation of fragment 31] is to prove the reality of *the man*—the triumphant male figure whose existence makes Sappho sexually pitiful and her ambiguous discourse of desire an unambiguous complaint of the woman scorned."¹⁰⁷ In the end, how different is Ovid as he himself actively fashions a heterosexual Sappho who desires, and therefore takes extraordinary measures, to be the eternal object of Phaon's desire? The seventeenth-century translator distorted the Sapphic fragments in her renditions, excising telling homoerotic moments, offering cleansed and uncompromising titles to each lyric piece in an effort to aid (or perhaps to prejudice) the reader, combining biography and verse to create her desired (heterosexual) version of the poet.¹⁰⁸ Similarly Ovid, always lurking in the shadows behind his heroine, attempting to elude the reader's gaze through the act of ventriloquism, manipulates Sappho's lyric. He too produces his own version of the Greek poet, his own interpretation of her verse and of her desire. He seeks to prove not the reality of the man in Sappho's poetry but to establish an illusory reality of the Woman for himself, for his readers. On all counts, controlling both her poetic expression and her expression of women's desire(s), Ovid sets Sappho straight.

Lacan's theories of desire provide us with a fruitful tool for interpreting Ovid's handiwork. Sappho, like Lacan, does not believe in Woman, only in women. Ovid, through the relentless repetition of the heroines in the *Heroides*, deftly reduces women to Woman. It is in *Heroides* 15, Ovid's striking re-reading of Sappho, that we see most clearly the principle animating the entire epistolary collection. The example of Sappho reveals marked differences between Ovid writing like a woman, and a woman writing. But what do these differences suggest? Why does Sappho deny the possibility of any one, single generalization about women? Why, conversely, does Ovid go to such great length to highlight an underlying similarity in his heroines, and by extension, women? What does his compulsion to create homogeneity reveal? It is now time to consider these questions.

Conclusion

Male and Female: Ovid's Illusion of the Woman

I think I've scratched the surface after twenty years of marriage.

Women want chocolate and conversation.

Mel Gibson, quoted in *USA Weekend*, 11/12/00

You need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini [of Saint Theresa] to immediately understand that she's coming. There's no doubt about it.

Jacques Lacan, "God and Woman's Jouissance"

In Rome? So far away? To look? At a statue? Of a saint? Sculpted by a man? What pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure?

Luce Irigaray, "Così Fan Tutti"

Is it possible to uncover traces of an author's gender in an artistic and intellectual product? To what extent can one distinguish between the voice of a man writing like a woman and the words of a woman writing? Why does a male writer choose to employ the technique of "transvestite ventriloquism," or cross-gendered narration? Why, for a reader of classical texts, does an encounter with the poetry of Sappho produce an experience in difference? What social and political issues emerge from a consideration of desire? Or from an exploration of the discrepancy between the representation of women and the construction of the Woman?

Ovid's collection of fifteen missives from famous literary heroines to the heroes who have abandoned them raises all of these larger questions.

A reading of the *Heroides* that focuses on the rules of, and expectations produced by, the epistolary genre reveals that the heroines twist the generic conventions of the letter against themselves. Upsetting the delicate generic balancing act of the power of the reader and that of the writer over a letter's contents, in favor of the addressee, highlighting the absence and distance that require a letter, and pointing out the epistle's failure to incorporate conversational exchange, the heroines seem to underscore their helplessness. And yet, a shift in emphasis from epistolarity to desire, a shift invited by the elegiac genre that Ovid chooses for the *Heroides*, renders the heroines' self-constructions more complicated. Lacanian theories of desire, especially of feminine desire, cast a different light on the self-portraits of the Ovidian women. Lacan argues that feminine subjects desire to be the object of desire, and willingly act out various roles in order to achieve their goal. Ovid's heroines do just this, fashioning themselves simultaneously in two disparate and irreconcilable ways. The helplessness and vulnerability that an examination of the epistolary genre uncovers turns out to be one aspect of the strategy manipulated by most of the heroines to rekindle the heroes' desire. On the other hand, the women also conjure up images of themselves as powerful figures.

Lacan's arguments about feminine desire in conjunction with the element of narcissism he points out in masculine desire provide useful exegetical material for the self-representations of the majority of the Ovidian heroines. Masculine subjects, seeking most of all to convince themselves, and everyone else, of their existence as whole, complete subjects in need of no one, enter into a relationship of identification with their lovers. Creating the lover as his mirror image, the masculine subject envisions and then adores an idealized form of the lover as a perfect reflection of himself. At the same time, however, he feels aggression toward the lover *qua* mirror image because it becomes difficult for him to differentiate between self and other. The masculine subject thus needs to discover a way to mark the difference between them. Either by imagining her¹ as an idealized version of himself, or by casting her as utterly different from himself in order to

create distance between them, the masculine subject employs the lover to create a reflection of his own potency. Many of the Ovidian heroines accommodate the masculine subject's penchant for Imaginary identification. Desiring, as feminine subjects do, to remain the eternal object of the heroes' desire, the heroines set their understanding of the narcissistic aspects of masculine desire to work in service of their goal. Self-consciously they choose to act out roles that will satisfy the masculine subject's demands of the mirror image.

A few heroines—Medea, Hypsipyle, and even to a certain extent Sappho—demonstrate what seems on the surface to be an alternative method of self-construction. And yet, a closer consideration reveals that here too Lacanian ideas about feminine desire and Imaginary identification fruitfully serve to elucidate the heroines' self-portraits. Lacan draws an important distinction between masculine and feminine subjects in the realm of identification. While the masculine subject in an erotic relationship seeks Imaginary identification with his lover, the feminine subject remains preoccupied with *women* in their guise as potential objects of her lover's desire. Thus, she establishes a relationship of adoration and aggression with another woman (or other women), seeing in her both an ideal whom she must imitate and a rival from whom she must distance herself. Some Ovidian heroines, therefore, construct themselves in a twofold manner predicated on a relationship of identification with their fantasized projections of their rivals for the heroes' desire. Either method of self-fashioning, however, whether the heroines construct themselves or their putative rivals as mirror image, in fact relies on a similar fundamental principle. The heroines act out divergent roles, for the simple reason that they long, according to the structure of feminine desire, to remain the object of the heroes' desire.

So Ovid, perceptive student and interpreter of the erotic relationship, carefully works to provide his heroines with characteristics born from the structures of genuine feminine desire. The *Heroides* present the reader with a string of women, who, one after another, in a repetitive fashion, dissolve all sense of their own stable identities and take on instead a series of roles. One might almost believe one is listening to authentic female voices. And yet . . . While, on the one hand, the Ovidian text acknowledges the performative aspect of the heroines, on the other, the

poet simultaneously goes to great lengths to limit the number and kind of the performances that they undertake. On close examination, each heroine, whether she manipulates the Imaginary identification of a masculine or a feminine subject, portrays herself as acting out the two irreconcilable roles of powerful and helpless woman. All women, the *Heroides* suggest, are the same, and the repetition from heroine to heroine underscores this fact. The unavoidable confrontation with the collection's iterative nature compels yet a further consideration of Ovid's portrayal of women. The fifteenth, and final, letter of the epistolary collection, Sappho's missive to Phaon, provides us with a way to probe even deeper into the construction of the heroines. While the Ovidian Sappho exactly replicates the patterns of self-fashioning of the other fourteen heroines, a glance at her "source text," the poetry of Sappho, allows for a very different portrayal of women and their desire(s). The change Ovid effects between the vision of women in Sappho's poetry and his own construction of Sappho, indeed of all the heroines, compels us to consider the significant difference between women and the Woman.

Surrounded by the male-authored classical texts that survive for us, Sappho possesses a unique voice. She speaks a desire that diverges from other Greek and Roman constructions of the erotic relationship; over the centuries, her erotic discourse has baffled, distressed, and/or excited critics, depending on their own disparate, and often unacknowledged, biases. She creates women and their desire(s) so that they are multiple, complex, ever-changing, resistant to any sweeping generalization that encompasses them all in any meaningful way. But does Sappho's text stand for the way a woman, the Woman, conceptualizes women and their desire(s)? Since we do not possess many other female voices with which to form comparisons, it would be dangerous to postulate that Sappho's expression of feminine desire represents the erotic experience of Lesbian, or lesbian, women, let alone women in antiquity. Because Sappho writes as a member of the Greek elite on archaic Lesbos in the seventh century B.C.E., a society about which we know relatively little, to say that Sappho speaks *qua* Woman threatens to elide such important considerations as historical moment, culture, class. Rather, she offers one possibility out of the many potential ways in which different women, formed by distinct social and political experiences at

distinct moments, might choose to construct their vision of women and their erotic relationships. Indeed, a reading of Sappho's own poetry, inspired by feminist as well as Lacanian interpretation, reveals that the Greek poet herself celebrates women's heterogeneity.

The key to reading the *Heroides* lies in the difference between Sappho's insistence on women's heterogeneity and Ovid's careful construction, through relentless repetition, of an unvarying and monolithic Woman. Why, we must ask, does Ovid present his reader with Woman, even calling attention to this fact by the stark change from the "source text's" representation of the feminine that he brings about with his Sappho in *Heroides* 15? Here again Lacan serves as a fruitful hermeneutic tool for unpacking the construction of the heroine in the *Heroides*. Lacanian thoughts on the Woman provide us both with a way of casting light on Ovid's project, as well as with the means by which to question its ultimate efficacy.

Lacan makes a series of provocatively enigmatic pronouncements about Woman, claiming "Woman does not exist," that "there is no such thing as Woman," or that Woman is "not-all." He argues that one cannot isolate a universal characteristic that will describe all women since there exists no unifying principle by which one can cause Woman to emerge from the infinite variety of actual human women. And yet, despite the impossibility of creating Woman out of women, nevertheless, we, perhaps men especially, constantly seek to construct one. We strive to impose some form of control, insisting on being able to know, and therefore to categorize, "her," in order to cover over the anxiety-producing fact of "her" fundamental unknowability. Each effort at constructing an all-encompassing definition for Woman, however, must be doomed to failure; in proffering any general statement, any universalization, we may alleviate our anxiety, but we create only a fantasy.²

So we should not be surprised, then, that the *Heroides* offers up a fantasy Woman. Nancy K. Miller writes about the heroine in an eighteenth-century French epistolary novel: "She *testifies* simply to the power not of the female imagination, but to the power of the female in the male imagination. To the extent that she is a heroine, she is *that which* allows men to write, to and of each other."³ In the final analysis, the construction of the heroine reveals more

about men than it does about women. Miller's observation, especially when considered in conjunction with Lacan's complementary reflections about men and Woman, pulls together many of the threads we have been discussing. On the one hand, the Ovidian heroines provide an opportunity for men to write to each other. The *Heroides* carry on a conversation about storytelling and textuality with (the mostly male) authors who have preceded Ovid within the literary tradition. Ovid presents his rendition of narratives and of heroines so that they enter into dialogue with the prior "source texts" that he chooses to re-weave. In addition, the letter generically—as a fragment of a larger narrative—expects the reader to supplement information that s/he already knows. This supplemental information comes from the prior texts. Moreover, Ovid constructs the *Heroides'* external reader so that s/he becomes gendered "masculine." He renders the reader complicit with, or at least, in the position of, the abandoning hero as the one who must foist closure on the open-ended epistle/desire of the heroine. In other words, it is the external reader, mimicking the position of the hero, who refuses—indeed, must refuse, since "he" already "knows" the story—the possibility of a happy ending.

On the other hand, the Ovidian heroines are even more profoundly manifestations of the male imagination. They become the vehicles by which, as Miller notes, men write *of* each other. By creating fifteen women who so closely resemble one another, by reducing the various heroines of mythology and literature to a single pattern, Ovid betrays his anxiety in the face of women's protean diversity. This is most easily discernible in the example of Sappho, where Ovid confronts head-on a "source text" that celebrates the complexity and multifariousness of women. When he closes down the possibilities that Sappho creates for women through the mouthpiece of his own Sappho and through direct echoes of Sapphic fragments, Ovid's project of limiting Woman by means of a single, unifying principle becomes clear. While Sappho embraces and cultivates women's heterogeneity, Ovid strives to keep his women under control. Although potentially opening the door to Woman's indefinable nature by allowing that her desire renders her a performer, he also simultaneously attempts to restrict her performances. Each heroine becomes, through the *Heroides'* relentless repetition, the same heroine. The

text defines Woman as one who acts in accordance with two basic roles: powerful, and helpless. In this way, the heroines become the vehicle through which the poet, in the guise of writing like a woman, constructs a masculine fantasy or illusion of the Woman.

But the story does not end here. It seems possible, at least, as I have tried to do throughout my interpretation, to imagine a reader who fights against total complicity with the illusion the text works so hard to create. In the spirit of the doubleness that pervades the *Heroides*, a second possibility for interpretation, perhaps a supplement to the first, also emerges from the text. And here we return to Lacan's arguments about the nonexistence of Woman. The self-representations of the heroines demonstrate the powerful drive to circumscribe women by means of a single, universal definition, to achieve some form of control over women by turning them into Woman. And yet, simultaneously, the unrelenting construction of Woman undermines itself by its very insistence. In the elaborate and artificial fashioning of Woman, the *Heroides*, it seems, protest too much. The very same doggedness that creates Woman also provides the critical means by which to unmask the shortcomings of the illusion born from anxiety, the fantasy that such homogeneity is possible. When the Ovidian women, seeking to appear desirable and longing to be desired, reveal that their self-representations amount to rhetorically constructed performances, ultimately the disclosure leads to the conclusion that all their self-portraits are, in some sense, false.

Inevitably the performative aspect of the heroine leads to questions about how performance of any sort can form the basis of a stable definition of Woman? Is it feasible to talk of discovering an underlying "reality" to performance? What would "real" mean to an acknowledged thespian who puts on characteristics and take them off again at will, as if they were pieces of clothing or accessories? The mere fact that she performs ensures that no one can ever pin the heroine down, know who she really is; once she has established herself as an actress, or perhaps even a deceiver, it is no longer possible to determine where performance stops and "reality" begins. At this level, Ovid's heroines might be said actually to embody Lacan's proposition that ultimately one cannot reduce women to Woman based on a single unifying principle. In her guise as shape shifter, Ovid's Woman actually

puts into question the feasibility of the very principle by which Ovid chooses to define Woman. *Qua* performer she is but a masquerade, a collection of adornments, here taking the form of the various roles she acts out. And what kind of stable definition can we ascribe to her if she is, by definition, always something else? Divested of her performances, Woman in the Ovidian text remains inscrutable, ineffable.⁴ Despite Ovid's valiant attempts to the contrary, the definition he posits for Woman evaporates; Lacan's observation, that the "Woman does not exist," rings true. Stable, knowable, essential identity disintegrates, leaving in its place a prevailing understanding that the very narratives the heroines weave undermine the reliability of the illusion of the Woman that emerges from the *Heroides*.

Notes

Bibliography

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Notes

Introduction

1. I use the text of Peter E. Knox, ed., *Heroides: Select Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) for the poems he prints (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15). For the three remaining poems that I cite—3, 9, 12—I use the texts from the recent commentaries of Alessandro Barchiesi, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae Heroidum* 1–3 (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1992), for 3; Sergio Casali, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Heroidum Epistula IX—Deianira Herculi* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1995), for 9; and Federica Bessone, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Heroidum Epistula XII—Medea Iasoni* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1997), for 12. For the purposes of similarity of citation throughout, although Barchiesi, Bessone, and Casali capitalize to mark the beginning of Latin sentences, I have chosen not to.

2. Florence Verducci, *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart: Epistulae Heroidum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 288–89.

3. The largest body of interpretive work that seeks to examine the single *Heroides* in a new, recuperative light focuses on issues of genre and intertextuality. See, for example, Duncan F. Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's *Heroides*," *Classical Quarterly* (1984): 413–22; Alessandro Barchiesi, "Problemi d'interpretazione in Ovidio: continuità delle storie, continuazione dei testi," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 16 (1986): 77–107; "Narratività e convenzione nelle *Heroides*," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 19 (1987): 63–90; "Future Reflexive: Two Modes of Allusion and Ovid's *Heroides*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993): 333–65; Friedrich Spoth, *Ovids Heroides als Elegien*, *Zetemata* 89 (1992); Stephen Hinds, "Medea in Ovid: Scenes From the Life of an Intertextual Heroine," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 30 (1993): 9–47; Gianpiero Rosati, "L'elegia al femminile: le *Heroides* di Ovidio (e altre *Heroides*),"

Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici 29 (1993): 71–94; Joseph Farrell, "Reading and Writing the *Heroides*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998): 307–38. In addition, several recent commentaries, again mostly concentrating on intertextual and genre-based readings, have appeared. See, for example, Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*; Knox, *Select Epistles*; Casali, *Epistula IX*; Bessone, *Epistula XII*; Theodor Heinze, *P. Ovidius Naso Der XII. Heroidenbrief: Medea an Jason* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

4. Farrell, "Reading and Writing," considers the *Heroides* in conjunction with the advice Ovid gives to women about letter writing and love affairs in the *Ars Amatoria*.

5. I provide here a sample of typical statements about *Heroides* 1–15. A wonderful and much quoted example is the analogy drawn by L. P. Wilkinson in *Ovid Surveyed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 43: "the single *Heroides* (1–15) are a uniform plum pudding with a fair admixture of glittering rings and sixpences. The first slice is appetising enough, but each further slice becomes colder and less digestible, until the only incentive for going on is the prospect of coming across an occasional ring or sixpence." He further complains "The heroines are little differentiated except to the extent that their situations differ" (97). Brooks Otis proclaims that single *Heroides* present the reader with "the wearisome complaint of the reft maiden, the monotonous iteration of her woes," *Ovid As An Epic Poet*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 17. E. J. Kenney, in the introduction to his edition of *Heroides* 16–21, writes that "it is difficult to rescue [the single *Heroides*], especially if they are read sequentially, from the charge of monotony," *Heroides 16–21* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

6. For example, Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 381–404, devotes an entire section of his book to a discussion of the principle of *variatio* in the *Heroides*, and makes a claim typical of this line of argument: "For the more similar the poems are from a gross perspective in their general shape and themes (and these surely are similar), the more subtle must be the distinctions which mark and identify each one as unique" (382). More recently, see Farrell, "Reading and Writing," and Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*. In fact, intertextual readings in general will tend to emphasize the individuality of each poem within the collection since Ovid creates allusions to a different "source text" in (almost) every epistle.

7. In the category "formalist," I would place Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, Verducci, *Toyshop*, and Gian Biagio Conte, *Genres and Readers: Lucretius, Love Elegy, and Pliny's Encyclopedia*, trans. Glenn W. Most

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 117 and 121–22; as well as the critics who concentrate on intertextuality and allusion, for example, the work of Barchiesi and Hinds on the *Heroides*, Bessone, *Epistula XII*, Casali, *Epistula IX*.

8. Verducci, *Toyshop*, argues that Ovid turns his heroines into travesties of their previous literary selves. Barchiesi, Hinds, “Medea in Ovid,” Bessone, *Epistula XII*, Casali, *Epistula IX*, Kennedy, “The Epistolary Mode,” examine the heroines through the change they undergo in generic register. Both Verducci and Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, take note of Ovid’s poetic competition with his “source texts,” although Verducci shows how the agonistic engagement is to Ovid’s advantage while Jacobson most often ascribes to it the failings he sees in particular epistles. That many interpretations of the *Heroides* contain assumptions about Ovid’s anti-Augustan stance emerges most clearly in readings of *Heroides* 7, Dido’s letter to Aeneas, in which, according to the arguments, Dido’s values openly clash with those of Augustus. See, for example, Marilyn Desmond, “When Dido Reads Vergil: Gender and Intertextuality in Ovid’s *Heroides* 7,” *Helios* 20.1 (1993): 56–68. As to the values of Augustan Rome, Augustus’ effort to consolidate his new regime by reviving the prestige and moral authority of Rome’s leading social orders is well known, including measures to “purify” the Senate and equestrian orders (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, 35–39), a spectacular building program that explicitly evoked a demanding code of civic duty (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, 31, and Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988]), and the laws of 18 B.C.E. that encouraged marriage and the production of legitimate children (the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus*) and criminalized adultery (the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis*). For a concise overview, see Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), especially chapters 2–4. Recent scholarship on Augustan poetry in general, as well as on Ovid in particular, casts the relationship between the literature and Augustan ideology in more complex terms than “Augustan” or “anti-Augustan.” Alessandro Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and Augustan Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) is a nice example.

9. To cite a few examples in the field of Roman poetry: S. G. Nugent, “This Sex Which Is Not One: De-Constructing Ovid’s Hermaphrodite,” *differences* 2.1 (1990): 160–85; Marilyn B. Skinner, “Ego Mulier: The Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus,” *Helios* 20.2 (1993): 107–30; Barbara K. Gold, “‘But Ariadne Was Never There in the First Place’: Finding the Female in Roman Poetry,” in *Feminist Theory and the Classics*,

ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 75–101; Micaela Janan, *When The Lamp Is Shattered: Desire and Narrative in Catullus* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), and now also *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Ellen Greene, “Elegiac Woman: Fantasy, *Materia* and Male Desire in Propertius 1.3 and 1.11,” *American Journal of Philology* 116 (1995): 303–18; Sara H. Lindheim, “Hercules Cross-Dressed, Hercules Undressed: Unmasking the Construction of the Propertian *Amator* in Elegy 4.9,” *American Journal of Philology* 119 (1998): 43–66.

10. See, for example, Conte, *Genres and Readers*.

11. I cite here a small sampling of the significant scholarship exploring Ovid’s play with genre. For the poet’s engagement with genre in works other than the *Heroides*, see Conte, *Genre and Readers*, chapter 2, “Love Without Elegy: The *Remedia amoris* and the Logic of a Genre,” 35–65; Stephen Hinds, *The Metamorphoses of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and “Arma in Ovid’s *Fasti*,” *Arethusa* 25 (1992): 81–149; Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince*. For examinations of Ovid’s use of genre in the *Heroides*, see note 3, above.

12. Verducci, *Toyshop*, *passim*.

13. Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, *passim*.

14. See, for example, the works of Barchiesi, Bessone, *Epistula XII*, and Casali, *Epistula IX*, *passim*.

15. Consider Farrell, “Reading and Writing,” who argues, on the basis of an examination of various letter-writing women in Ovidian texts (*Ars Amatoria* and Byblis in the *Metamorphoses*), that “the letter exacts from the female writer a more thorough disclosure of her soul even than she may wish” (322), and similarly that “the more basic attitude pervading the *Heroides* [is] that writing is an inherently truthful act and the letter a medium of honesty” (329).

16. I borrow this expressive phrase from Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992).

17. I speak here in terms of heterosexual desire because the *Heroides* feature only heterosexual love stories.

18. I offer here but the briefest statements about Lacanian theory. I have a lengthier explanation of the Lacanian theory on which I draw in chapter 2, section entitled “Jacques Lacan on Subjectivity and Desire: Or, What Does a Woman Want?” 83–89.

19. See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge. Seminar XX (Encore!)*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), especially chapters 6 and 7, 64–89.

1. Mail and Female

1. Cicero provides evidence that Roman women employed the epistle as a form of communication. Often in his letters to his wife, Terentia, Cicero refers to her letters to him: *Epistulae ad Familiares* 14.4 (6 SB), 14.2 (7 SB), 14.1 (8 SB), 14.3 (9 SB). (I give both the traditional enumeration and the numbers used by Shackleton Bailey [SB]). In the *Brutus*, he mentions the letters of a prominent Roman woman, Cornelia, mother of Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus. He writes: *Legimus epistulas Corneliae matris Gracchorum: apparet filios non tam in gremio educatos quam in sermone matris* (“we have read the letters of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi. It is apparent that her sons were educated not so much at the knee as by the words of their mother” [58.211.1–2]. All the translations are mine, except where otherwise noted.). There is evidence from Ovid’s own pen that points to women communicating through letters. In the third book of the *Ars Amatoria*, lines 473–98, the poet offers advice to Roman women about how to write effective love letters. Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite From Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 1999), chapter 6, “Women and Writing: Prose,” especially 188–206, cites the examples in Cicero and Ovid when she considers the letter writing of educated women among the Roman élite. She also discusses four letters written by women found at Vindolanda, a Roman military outpost in northern Britain. Finally, Raffaella Cribiore, “Windows on a Woman’s World: Some Letters From Roman Egypt,” in *Making Silence Speak: Women’s Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, ed. André Lardinois and Laura McClure (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 223–39, examines some personal correspondence written by women in Egypt.

2. Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 6. This book is now a classic exploration of epistolary fiction. She concentrates, however, on the epistolary novel, on the manner in which narrative can be created by, and then sustained through, epistolary correspondence. Technically the *Heroides*, at least in the first fifteen letters, do not fall into Altman’s category of epistolary novel for many reasons—most notably because the story does not unfold in epistolary exchange between two or more correspondents. Nevertheless many of the characteristics of the epistle to which Altman draws attention also appear in the Ovidian text.

Among classical texts the numerous pseudonymous letter collections, compilations of letters purported to be the private correspondence of famous historical men (e.g., Themistocles, Hippocrates, Democritus, Diogenes the Cynic) provide a nice example of epistolary fiction masquerading as reality. These fictitious collections, the majority

dating from the first or second century C.E., all seek to cloak their fictitiousness with the appearance of genuineness. This is not to say that the reader should or would mistake the letters for the genuine epistolary output of these great men, but rather they should view them as exemplars of what and how these men would have written had we access to their personal correspondence. The pseudonymous collections demonstrate nicely the connection between epistolary fiction and the rhetorical school exercise, the *ethopoieia*, in which the student becomes a specific character, speaking out as if in his voice. For a fuller discussion of pseudonymous letter collections, including their connections to *ethopoieiae*, see Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), who devotes a chapter to these texts: chapter 8, "Pseudonymous Letter Collections," 193–233.

3. Gian Biagio Conte and Glenn W. Most, "genre," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 630. Conte has made significant contributions to the ways in which Classicists in general, and students of Latin poetry in particular, think about genre. The dictionary entry condenses and recaps many of Conte's central ideas in his important studies, *Genres and Readers* and *Virgilio, il genere e i suoi confini* (Milan: Garzanti, 1984).

4. Conte and Most, "genre," 631.

5. Conte, *Genres and Readers*, 36. For a general discussion of genre, see also Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). Francis J. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), reveals a similar analysis of the *function* of genre in Greek and Roman poetry, although he expresses differences with Fowler in the *definition* of the term. For an excellent discussion of the way a poetic form creates an audience that, from previous poems in a genre, knows what to expect from other, later poems in the same genre and that, by the same token, can appreciate the alterations the poet makes within the genre he chooses, see the introductory chapter of William C. Dowling, *The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3–20.

6. Here see Conte and Most, "genre," 631. As examples, they single out Virgil's *Eclogue* 10, Horace's discussion of the lack of Augustan tragedy in *Epistle* 2.1 as well as Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* and the *Heroides*.

7. Conte, *Genres and Readers*, 124.

8. See Introduction, notes 3 and 11.

9. Conte, *Genres and Readers*, 117. In *Latin Literature: A History*, trans. Joseph B. Solodow (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 347, Conte suggests that the union of elegy and myth constitutes Ovid's generic originality in the *Heroides*.

10. Meter is often the most significant, defining element in the few ancient theoretical discussions of genre; see Conte and Most, "genre," 630.

11. For a concise overview of elegy's generic conventions, see Conte, *Latin Literature*, 321–24.

12. The summary I offer here is based on an interpretation of love elegy that focuses on a basic generic code that ties together the wide-ranging oeuvres of the various elegiac poets. Important work establishing the parameters of the elegiac code has been done, with different emphases, by Conte, especially *Genres and Readers*, as well as by Paul Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). As with any set of rules, exceptions to the conventions established by the elegiac code abound. Indeed, many interpreters of elegy now focus their attention on the tension between, or more strongly, the competing demands of, the exceptions and the generic code. Here see for example, Duncan F. Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) on elegy in general; Paul Allen Miller, "The Tibullan Dream Text," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 129 (1999): 181–224, on Tibullus' elegy; and Janan, *The Politics of Desire*, on Propertian elegy.

13. For detailed discussions of the numerous similarities between the *Heroides* and Roman elegiac poetry see especially Spoth, *Ovids Heroides als Elegien, passim*. Also see Sara Mack, *Ovid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 17–20 and 69–83; Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides, passim*; Rosati, "L'elegia al femminile"; and the various works of Barchiesi. I discuss what I believe to be the most significant implications of the elegiac genre on the *Heroides* in my second chapter.

14. Conte, *Genres and Readers*, 122. Also see the arguments of Rosati, "L'elegia al femminile."

15. *ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus* ("he invented this form unknown to others," *Ars Amatoria* 3.346). Scholars interpret this line in a wide variety of ways. They suggest that Ovid took characters and scenes from mythology, that he transferred the *suasoria* from prose to verse, that he turned erotic elegy into theatrical performance, that he put out a collection of letters instead of individual epistles, that he concentrated on the theme of farewell, that he made epistolary elegy didactic in nature. The different claims are aptly discussed by Albert R. Baca,

"Ovid's Claim to Originality and *Heroides* 1," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 100 (1969): 1–10, especially 2–4. Baca himself proposes that the psychological portrayal of the heroines and of their emotions constitute what is novel in the *Heroides*. He warns (4), however, "*quot homines, tot sententiae*" (every reader has her/his own opinion).

16. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*.

17. J. Sykutris, "Epistolographie," *RE Supplement* 5 (1931): 185–220.

18. The chronologies of many of these texts are the matter of debate. See Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, for discussion of each text, and bibliography.

19. For women, *Ars Amatoria* 3.473–98, and for men 1.437–86.

20. The date of this work is in question. For a summary discussion of the debate, see Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 2. He explains the false attribution of the treatise to Demetrius of Phalerum and the various possible dates for the treatise ranging from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. After weighing the evidence, Malherbe concludes that "a sober judgment would appear to be that the earliest extensive discussion of epistolary theory dates from the first century B.C."

21. Although Seneca's text postdates Ovid's death by about forty five years, one can reasonably assume that epistolary theory underwent no radical transformations in such a relatively short period of time, especially since Senecan statements seem to echo and not to contradict those of Cicero, who himself predates Ovid.

22. In *Epistulae ad Familiares* 2.4.1 (48 SB) Cicero explicitly acknowledges that the main purpose of letter writing is to pass on information to one who is absent.

23. Altman, *Epistolarity*, 185.

24. Altman, *Epistolarity*, 185–87.

25. Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares*, 12.30.1 (417.1 SB).

26. Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 12.53 (295 SB).

27. Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 9.10.1 (177.1 SB). Seneca makes a similar claim about the letter as a replica of spoken dialogue. In *Epistulae Morales* 75.1, he claims that the reason that he refuses to polish his epistolary prose excessively is that no one engaged in oral conversation speaks with extraordinary care.

28. *Tristia* 5.13.27–30. Compare also *Epistulae Ex Ponto* 1.7.1–2: *littera pro verbis tibi, Messaline, salutem / quam legis, a saevis attulit usque Getis* ("A letter, rather than spoken words, from the land of the savage Getae, has conveyed to you, Messalinus, the salutation that you are reading").

29. *Epistulae Ex Ponto* 3.5.29. Several of the manuscripts read *legendo* ("by reading") rather than *loquendo* ("through conversation"). The reading *legendo* would imply that Ovid, like Cicero, sees the acts of

both writing and reading letters as means of constructing presence from absence.

30. For example, *Tristia* 1.7.9–10; 3.5.23ff; 5.1.35ff; 5.7.5ff; 5.11.1ff; 5.12.1ff; *Epistulae Ex Ponto* 1.1.11ff; 1.5.29–30; 1.8.69ff. Altman, *Epistolarity*, discusses this epistolary technique (137–38).

31. *Epistulae Ex Ponto* 2.4.8.

32. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 40.1, lines 2–3.

33. Ovid, *Tristia* 5.1.79–80: *cur mittam, quaeritis, isto? / vobiscum cupio quolibet esse modo* (“You seek to know why I send my compositions there? I desire to be with you in any way possible”).

34. “Demetrius,” *On Style*, 223.

35. “Demetrius,” *On Style*, 227: “for each person writes a letter as nearly an image of his own soul.”

36. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 40.1, line 2.

37. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 40.1, lines 3–7.

38. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, discusses the blurred boundaries between reality and fiction in letters in her “Prologue,” 1–16.

39. G. D. Williams, *Banished Voices: Readings in Ovid's Exile Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), *passim*. One very clear example of a literary self-construction occurs in *Tristia* 1.5.57ff., where Ovid fictionalizes his “self” through a long and elaborate comparison to Odysseus; see Williams, 109. For a direct comparison of the many epistolary tropes shared by Ovid's exilic works and the *Heroides*, see Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, “Ovid's *Heroides* and *Tristia*: Voices From Exile,” *Ramus* 26.1 (1997): 29–56.

40. “Demetrius,” *On Style*, 224: “it is sent, in a way, as a gift.”

41. “Demetrius,” *On Style*, 234.

42. Altman, *Epistolarity*, 88.

43. For a detailed discussion of internal and external readers of epistolary texts, see Altman, *Epistolarity*, chapter 3, “The Weight of the Reader,” 87–115.

44. *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, 2.8.23ff.

45. In *Tristia* 2 Augustus is the internal reader, and, on the one hand, Ovid shapes his self-representation in this poem in accordance with this knowledge. On the other hand, this poem also nicely demonstrates the tension in the epistolary genre between the power of the reader and the power of the writer. While on one level Ovid wants Augustus to see the poet as a repentant man who should be forgiven, on another level Ovid compels Augustus to hear a discussion of literature in which the poet remains the teacher of a rather misguided *princeps*. See S. G. Nugent, “*Tristia* 2: Ovid and Augustus,” in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate*, ed. Kurt A. Raafaub and Mark Toher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 239–57.

46. Indeed, as Conte and Most remind us in “genre,” 630–31, the ancient thoughts on epistolary composition do not really present any coherent theoretical paradigm.

47. In the following discussion about the letter in Greek literature, specifically Homer, Euripides, and Callimachus, I am much indebted to Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, chapters 2, 3, and 5, respectively.

48. *Iliad* 6.152–70.

49. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, 43.

50. Indeed, it is interesting to note here that the Greeks ascribed the invention of letter writing to a woman, and to a barbarian queen at that. See Rosenmeyer’s discussion of queen Atossa, inventor of the letter, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, 24ff.

51. *Hippolytus*, lines 565ff.

52. *Hippolytus*, lines 724–31.

53. *Hippolytus*, lines 882–86.

54. *Iphigenia at Aulis*, lines 87–107.

55. *Iphigenia at Aulis*, lines 107–23.

56. *Hippolytus*, lines 887–90 and 1038ff.

57. *Ars Amatoria* 3.475–76.

58. *Ars Amatoria* 3.473. In this section about the *Ars*, my readings are greatly inspired by Farrell, “Reading and Writing,” 311–15. I differ, however, from Farrell on the question of women’s duplicity in the epistolary act. Farrell argues that women, when composing epistles, focus their deceptive energy on ways to circumvent those who would keep the letter from its intended recipient (315).

59. *Ars Amatoria* 3.475.

60. *Ars Amatoria* 3.477–78.

61. *Ars Amatoria* 1.459–62. For a fuller reading see Farrell, “Reading and Writing,” 311–13.

62. *Ars Amatoria* 1.467–68. Indeed, Ovid repeatedly urges the lover to use *blanditias* (“flattery,” 1.468 and 480) as well as *blanda verba* (“wheedling words,” 1.439 and 455).

63. *littera Cydippen pomo perlata fefellit, / insciaque est verbis capta puella suis* (“a letter composed on an apple deceived Cydippe, and unaware, the girl was ensnared by her own words,” *Ars Amatoria* 1.457–58).

64. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*, 117. For a full discussion of the “apple as letter” and of the versions of Acontius and Cydippe by Callimachus and Ovid with emphasis on epistolary tropes and conventions see her chapter 5, “Letters in Hellenistic Poetry,” 98–130.

65. Propertius 4.3.27–28.

66. Propertius 4.3.7–10.

67. Propertius 4.3.29–30.

68. Propertius 4.3.35ff. For a discussion of the map in this poem, see Janan, *The Politics of Desire*, 65–69.

69. *cum totiens absis, si potes esse meus* ("if you are able to be my husband although you are so often absent"), Propertius 4.3.2.

70. Propertius 4.3.18.

71. Propertius 4.3.33.

72. Propertius 4.3.41–42.

73. Janan sees a more Roman model for Arethusa, arguing that the self-portrait reflects Livy's Lucretia, *The Politics of Desire*, 62–64.

74. Here we touch upon the complicated debate concerning the dating of the *Heroides*. In his comprehensive chapter on the issues and problems involved in the dating of the *Heroides*, Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, rehearses the Ovidian evidence (*Ars Amatoria* 3.343–46; *Amores* 2.18.11–34; *Tristia* 4.10.57–60), and offers the suggestion that they were written between about 10 and 3 B.C.E. His conclusion seems to be at odds with the opinion of a majority of scholars who place the composition date earlier, often between 25 and 12 B.C.E.; see 300–318, and especially 312–13 for a summary of the standard views on dating this text. Jacobson's opinion grants primacy in date to Propertius' Arethusa poem. The poet's fourth book of elegies is usually given a publication date of in or around 16 B.C.E., the year of the death of Cornelia who speaks from beyond the grave in the final poem of the book. For the opposite view, that the *Heroides* antedate Propertius 4.3, see Erich Reitzenstein, *Wirklichkeitsbild und Gefühlsentwicklung bei Properz* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936), 17–34, and Carl Becker, "Die Späten Elegien des Properz," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 469–70. In addition, although one wades through murky waters in attempting to assign a publication or a composition date to the *Heroides* as a whole, one may complicate matters further by asking whether perhaps some of the Ovidian epistles were circulated individually before the poet published the entire collection. Heinrich Dörrie summarizes the futility of attempting to distinguish which poet took his cue from the other: "Die dichterische Absicht Ovids in den *Epistulae Heroidum*," *Antike und Abendland* 13 (1967): 51.

75. Ovid, *Tristia* 4.10.45–46: *saepe suos solitus recitare Propertius ignes, / iure sodalicii, quo mihi iunctus erat* ("Often Propertius used to recite his fiery poems because of the code of friendship that joined him to me").

76. Dörrie, "Die dichterische Absicht," believes that the Arethusa poem concerns itself with Roman themes of (Roman) war, and thus does not stand out as Ovid's direct model (51). Also on the topic of the extent to which Ovid's *Heroides* and Propertius' poem are similar, Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, takes issue with any comparison that presents Ovid as a facile imitator (347–48).

77. The one potential exception here is Medea in Euripides' tragedy of the same name. However, one can argue, as Froma Zeitlin does, that she too plays a secondary role to Jason, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama," in *Nothing To Do With Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 63–96. In general, Zeitlin explains: "Women as individuals or chorus may give their names as titles to plays; female characters may occupy center stage and leave a far more indelible emotional impression on their spectators than do their male counterparts (as does Antigone, for example, over Kreon). But *functionally* women are never an end in themselves. . . . Rather they play the roles of catalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers or saviors for the male characters. When elaborately represented, they may serve as antimodels as well as hidden models for that masculine self . . . and, concomitantly, their experience of suffering or their acts that lead them to disaster regularly occur before and precipitate those of men" (69), emphasis hers. Of *Medea* in particular, Zeitlin notes: "Yet even in this revolutionary play the typology still holds. Medeia's formal function in the plot is to punish Jason for breaking his sacred oath to her, through an exacting retribution of tragic justice, and she is the typical and appropriate agent, even if embodied in exotic form, for accomplishing that crucial end" (70–71).

78. See chapter 1, 13, and note 1.

79. See Dörrie, "Die dichterische Absicht," 47. Consider also Remo Giomini, *La Poesia Giovanile di Ovidio: Le Heroides* (Sulmo: Editrice EPI, 1958), 21, who views the *Heroides* as "l'approfondito studio dell'animo femminile nelle sue varie manifestazioni" ("an in-depth study of the female psyche in its various manifestations"). Along the same lines, Lucile Haley, "The Feminine Complex in the *Heroides*," *Classical Journal* 20 (1924–1925): 15–25.

80. This, in part, is the position held by Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*. One does notice, however, that while he makes statements such as "The world of myth is no longer reality or a symbolic reflection of reality, but to a large degree projections or extensions of individual minds" (349), he also seems to fall into the trap he attempts to avoid. While disavowing the existence of an unquestionable, monolithic reality, he still criticizes the heroines for being "myopic" (Laodamia, 353) or speaks about "the reduction of great, sometimes cataclysmic, events and myths to the narrow egocentric world of the heroine" (352, emphasis mine). At times like these with the use of pejorative terms, he seems to posit the existence of an objective Reality, and to hint that the heroines possess only a lesser, or rather a less noble, subjective one.

81. Consider Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode," who states that the reader should consider any deviation from the original "source text" on the part of the heroine's narrative—here from the *Odyssey* by Penelope—"as a clue planted by Ovid which will prompt us, with our superior knowledge through the *Odyssey* of what 'objectively' happened, to question Penelope's state of mind and motives in writing this letter" (421). Alessandro Barchiesi, "Future Reflexive," suggests that Ovidian irony "cuts both ways," inviting the reader to consider the *Heroides* in conjunction with prior texts and then questioning how much the reader's interpretation of the *Heroides* is based on "the acceptance of master fictions," or on his/her privileging of Ovid's "source texts" (350).

82. For this view see Verducci, *Toyshop*, *passim*.

83. Here see Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), in particular her prologue, 17–27. Similarly, see Marina Scordilis Brownlee, *The Severed Word: Ovid's Heroides and the Novela Sentimental* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

84. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 35.

85. Kauffman's eloquent formulation, *Discourses of Desire*, 24, nicely reflects Jacques Lacan's thought on desire. For my discussion of Lacanian theory, see chapter 2, section entitled "Jacques Lacan on Subjectivity and Desire: Or, What Does a Woman Want?" 83–89.

86. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 43.

87. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 48.

88. Duncan F. Kennedy made these remarks in his response to a panel entitled "Double-Speak: Gender and Genre in Ovid's (Double) *Heroides*," that took place at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association, December 30, 1997.

89. Kennedy's argument ("Response") resembles that of Barchiesi, "Future Reflexive," 334.

90. Speaking about Alexandrian poetry, but in a statement that applies equally to the *Heroides*, Barchiesi, "Future Reflexive," expressively claims: "the characters are caught in the process of becoming 'themselves,' of becoming traditional" (335). Barchiesi, however, is interested in this phenomenon from the perspective of the poet's manipulation of the poetic tradition and not from the perspective of the light it casts on the construction of the feminine.

91. Barchiesi, "Future Reflexive," 346.

92. *Ars Amatoria* 2.128.

93. This is the argument of Verducci, *Toyshop*, *passim*. But see also Barchiesi, "Problemi d'interpretazione."

94. This is the central point of investigation in the work of Barchiesi on the *Heroides*; but also see Bessone, *Epistula XII*, and Casali, *Epistula IX*.

95. Both Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, *passim*, and Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode," argue that Ovid causes the reader to consider the distinction between "subjective" and "objective" narrative.

96. It is fair to say here that although one cannot be absolutely sure that *Heroides* 1–15 as we have it represents the collection in the order envisioned by Ovid—leaving aside the thorny question of the authenticity of the Sappho letter (15) until chapter 3, 138–40 is nevertheless prevailing critical opinion to assume that they do, or, at the very least, that the Penelope letter stands, by Ovidian design, at the head of the collection. See Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, 15, n.1. See also Knox, *Select Epistles*, 12.

97. Penelope seems here to be taking quite literally the advice Ovid himself sends to a friend in *Tristia* 4.7. Complaining that he has not received many letters from his friend, Ovid asserts that he will ascribe the paucity of letters to the perils facing mail from Rome to Tomis. The poet then offers a solution for bypassing further obstacles to epistolary communication: write often, he urges, and some missives are bound to get through—*mille potest causis a te quae littera saepe / missa sit in nostras rara venire manus: / mille tamen causas scribendo vince frequenter* ("for a thousand reasons letters that are often sent by you are rarely able to come into my possession; therefore overcome those thousand reasons by writing frequently" [23–25].)

98. "Demetrius," *On Style*, 223.

99. Altman, *Epistolarity*, 135.

100. See chapter 1, section entitled "Epistolary Expectations," 20–21.

101. See especially Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode," especially 417ff. More cursory in his discussion is Peter Steinmetz, "Die literarische Form der *Epistulae Heroidum* Ovids," *Gymnasium* 94 (1987): 141.

102. *Odyssey* 1.358–59. It is interesting to consider here the analysis of the "speech-act" in the *Iliad* by Richard P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Martin defines *muthos* as "public speech" (37), that "implies authority and power" (22); for "throughout the poem the authority underlying *muthoi* is acknowledged in the audience's response to a given speech; the addressee is most often persuaded" (22, emphasis mine). Finally, *muthoi* belong to heroes since "the heroic imperative . . . demands that a hero learn to 'be a doer of deeds' and a speaker—not of words, but of *muthoi*, 'authoritative speech-acts'" (26). Although Martin writes of the *Iliad*, he does suggest that his analysis would apply to the *Odyssey* as well (14). When Telemachus, according to Martin's scheme, appropriates *muthoi* for men, he imputes to them the powerful, authoritative "speech-acts" that communicate and persuade.

103. Knox breaks with other editions here (for example, Arthur Palmer, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Heroides* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1898]; Heinrich Dörrie, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae Heroidum* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971] and Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*), printing *attinet* (“there’s no point in your writing”) rather than Bentley’s proposed emendation *tu tamen* (“you, however, write nothing”). The meaning does not change significantly for our purposes. In Knox’s text too Penelope’s words convey to Ulysses her desire that he speak, not write.

104. Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, points out the emphatic strength of *nil* for *ne* in this line (250).

105. Farrell, “Reading and Writing,” makes a similar observation about the collection of the *Heroides* as a whole, remarking on a speech/writing dichotomy that plays out along gender lines. He does not, however, divide these two methods according to the success or failure of their ability to communicate necessary or significant information. Rather, he argues that writing comes to be set up as a truthful means of expression belonging to the heroines while men communicate in deceitful speech.

106. Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, points out that Penelope echoes a description of Dido listening to Aeneas’ story at *Aeneid* 4.79—*pendet . . . narrantis ab ore* (“she hangs on the words of the one speaking”). Allusions to the *Aeneid* are frequent in this epistle, as Knox notes, and they serve to keep the epic context (i.e., the importance of Ulysses’ story) firmly in view.

107. See Kennedy, “The Epistolary Mode,” 413–22.

108. See here especially Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, on *Heroides* 1, *passim*.

109. Marilyn B. Katz, *Penelope’s Renown. Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). She observes: “. . . up until the point when Telemachus’ *anagnorismos* [recognition] effects the first stage of Odysseus’ return to Ithaca, Penelope’s conduct within the narrative is entirely one-dimensional. She longs for her husband’s return and remains resolutely steadfast and faithful. Her actions are encased, however, in a narrative that suggests a different direction for them and the possibility of a different outcome” (119). John J. Winkler, “Penelope’s Cunning and Homer’s,” in *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1990), 129–61, argues that a general ambiguity surrounds the character of Penelope. Sheila Murnaghan, “Penelope’s *Agnoia*: Knowledge, Power, and Gender in the *Odyssey*,” *Helios* 13.2 (1986): 103 similarly notes the uncertainty the heroine evokes.

110. Introducing an interpretation influenced by feminist anthropology, Winkler, “Penelope’s Cunning,” examines the phenomena of lying

and testing in Greek culture in conjunction with Penelope's behavior. He concludes that while Penelope maintains a degree of uncertainty regarding the beggar's identity, her actions are motivated by a rather strong hunch, fostered by her active probing, that he is Odysseus; see especially 142–43. Joseph Russo, "Interview and Aftermath: Dream, Fantasy and Intuition in *Odyssey* 19 and 20," *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982): 4–18, posits that Penelope comes away from her encounter with the beggar in Book 19 with a strong intuition, rather than a conscious knowledge, that her husband has returned. Her apprehension of his homecoming, never reaching the level of conscious understanding until the reunion of hero and heroine in Book 23, emerges through her various dreams and fantasies in Books 19 and 20. Some interpreters remain a little less sure of Penelope's motives, yet still attribute a great deal of cunning to her: see Patricia Marquart, "Penelope *Polutropos*," *American Journal of Philology* 106.1 (1985): 32–48. Along similar lines, Nancy Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope. From Character to Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), proposes that Penelope's cunning leads her to set the contest of the bow, but still she contends that the actual outcome for which the heroine is striving remains ambiguous (17).

111. As to the lurking possibility that Penelope resembles Helen and Clytemnestra, consider Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope*, 37. See also Katz, *Penelope's Renown*, on the "House of Atreus motif," especially 6–7, 43–53 and 119–20.

112. It is interesting to note that while Clytemnestra lurks as a constant (absent) presence in the *Odyssey*, a foil to Penelope and a threat of what Penelope might become (see note 111, above), the Argive queen and the reception she gives to her returning husband remain conspicuously absent from Penelope's letter.

113. For Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*, *quid mihi prodest* recalls the *recusatio* motif employed by Augustan poets when they decline to write epic poetry and opt instead for another, less exalted, genre. Here, argues Barchiesi, Ovid is playfully pointing to the fact that Penelope has chosen to tell her epic story in elegiac verse. This line of argument focuses on the witty, generic games of Ovid rather than on the portrayal of the heroine.

114. Agamemnon stands as the counter-example to Odysseus in the text. In the *Second Nekuia* (*Odyssey* 24.191–204) he argues that his wretched death upon his return home at the hands of his unfaithful wife and her lover negates his hard-worn glory in war. For a nice discussion, see Katz, *Penelope's Renown*, 20–29.

115. Sheila Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 123.

116. It is interesting to note here that Barchiesi, in his introductory remarks on *Heroides* 1, *Epistulae Heroidum*, 54–55, divides the epistle at its center (line 58) into an opening half that focuses on events of the *Iliad* and a closing half that turns to the *Odyssey*. He is not, however, concerned with Iliadic as opposed to Odyssean models of glory and what the change of emphasis in heroic values does to the importance of Penelope as a character.

117. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 252. I cannot agree, however, when he continues his thought with the declaration that Penelope, in each pentameter, demonstrates that she considers herself the victim of the war. Cf. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*

118. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*, points to a wonderful Ovidian irony that the intertextual reader enjoys. Using the very elegiac terms of *urbanitas/rusticitas*, Penelope imagines Ulysses' preference of another woman over his wife against the Homeric backdrop of Odysseus' clear and opposite choice of Penelope over the goddess Calypso at *Odyssey* 5.214–20. Once again, however, Barchiesi's reading highlights the relationship between Ovid and his reader rather than between the poet and his fictional heroine.

119. *Odyssey* 19.136–56.

120. *Odyssey* 19.137.

121. "Thus Penelope, remembering selectively, . . . has trimmed her plots to a single type, to the story of holding the suitors at bay until Odysseus' return . . . By omitting . . . details, Penelope—like every auto-diegetic teller—launders her own image for posterity," Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope*, 41. And indeed, Penelope succeeds. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, in his discussion of the sources for Ovid's treatment of Penelope in *Heroides* 1 (246–47), does point to variant, post-Homeric versions of her story in which she appears not as virtuous, chaste wife but as lascivious whore, engaging in sexual relations with all or some of the suitors in Ulysses' absence. These variant versions, however, did not become current, for "from the *Odyssey* was derived the unidimensional paradigm of virtue. Throughout Greek literature passing references to Penelope center on her virtuous devotion. It is in this mold that the Romans finally froze—or should we say embalmed—her. No longer subject for literary development, she proved a marvelous and acquiescent *exemplum* for feminine virtue . . .," (246 and footnote 7).

122. *Odyssey* 6.180–85.

123. See Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*

124. For a discussion of the Ovidian Penelope's lack of duplicity in her weaving, see Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, 23–25.

125. In fact, as Knox notes, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, *viduas* is a transferred epithet belonging properly to Penelope herself than to her hands.

126. This formulation does indeed appear in Latin poetry as appropriate for a woman's funeral monument. Compare here Marcia's desire to be remembered for all time as Cato's wife in the second book of Lucan's *De Bello Civili*. She pleads with Cato to marry her a second time so that the inscription on her tomb can read *Catonis Marcia* ("Marcia, wife of Cato" [2.343–44]). Similarly, within the *Heroides*, Dido casts aside the possibility that her tombstone will read *Elissa Sychaei* ("Elissa, wife of Sychaeus") for a distich about Aeneas' perfidy (*Heroides* 7.193ff).

127. In the *Odyssey* Penelope suspects another man might arrive in Ithaca and attempt to impersonate Odysseus: 23.215ff.

128. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 260, argues that the one implies the other, stating firmly that "*Tua sum* ["I am yours"] is equally its reciprocal, *meus es* ["you are mine"]." Against Jacobson's opinion, however, see *Heroides* 6 where Hypsipyle several times alludes to Jason as hers as she is his. She herself demands *vir meus hinc ieras; cur non meus inde redisti?* ("you had left from here as my husband; why did you not return as my husband?" [111]), and she quotes him as promising: *vir tuus hinc abeo, vir tibi semper ero* ("I go away from here as your husband; I shall always be your husband" [60]). Similarly Medea in *Heroides* 12, when she witnesses Jason's wedding procession through Corinth, announces that she could hardly control herself: *vix me continui, quin sic laniata capillos / clamarem "Meus est!" iniceremque manus* ("I scarcely held myself back from tearing my hair and shouting out: "He is mine" and laying my hands upon you" [157–58]). With less confidence, Oenone says: *laesa queror de te, si sinis ipse, meo* ("harmed, I complain about you who are mine, if you yourself allow it," *Heroides* 5.4).

129. *Odyssey* 18.265–70.

130. *Odyssey* 19.107–22. For an excellent discussion of "reverse similes" and their implications for gender roles, see Helene P. Foley, "Reverse Similes and Sex Roles in the *Odyssey*," in *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers*, ed. John Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 59–78.

131. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*, concentrates on this as a moment of Ovidian irony because in the *Odyssey* it will be Odysseus who, disguised as a beggar, comes home as an old man.

132. Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope*, 3.

133. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, commentary on *Heroides* 3, *passim*, explores the results of Ovid's transposition of the epic story of Briseis and Achilles into the elegiac register, at the level both of narrative perspective (Briseis responds to various moments in the *Iliad*) and of generic tropes and conventions.

134. This is the interpretation of Verducci, *Toyshop*, in her chapter on *Heroides* 3, "*Servitium Amoris: Heroides* 3," 88–121.

135. Marilyn B. Arthur, in her discussion of the sixth book of the *Iliad*, notes that Briseis, especially in the first books of the Homeric poem, appears as an object in the masculine world of war: “The Divided World of *Iliad* 6,” in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Helene P. Foley (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1981), 19–44, especially 24–26.

136. Ovid himself points out the way Agamemnon easily substitutes one woman for another: *Remedia Amoris* 475–76: ‘est’ ait Atrides ‘illius proxima forma / et, si prima sinat syllaba, nomen idem’ (“‘There is one [Briseis],’ said the son of Atreus, ‘next to her [Chryseis] in beauty, and, if the first syllable should give leave, the name is the same’”).

137. *Iliad* 9.336. When he calls Briseis his ἄλοχον θυμαρέα, “dear wife,” Achilles uses a formula Odysseus will employ to speak of Penelope, *Odyssey* 23.232. As scholars are quick to point out, the appellation is surprising since Briseis is not a wife but a concubine. On the one hand, Achilles chooses the words because he is trying to draw a parallel between Agamemnon’s decision to take Briseis and Paris’ abduction of Helen. See Bryan Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary*. Vol. 3, Books 9–12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *ad loc.*, as well as Jasper Griffin, ed., *Homer: Iliad Book Nine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), *ad loc.* On the other hand, as Griffin observes, when he calls her “wife” Achilles reveals that his feelings for Briseis run deeper than for an “ordinary captive girl.”

138. *Iliad* 9.342–43. To be sure, as Griffin points out, *Iliad* Book Nine, *ad loc.*, “the past tense is rather chilling.” For the problematic meaning of φίλος in Homer where the word seems to indicate a feeling of non-hostility, or a sense of relaxation with a person, see David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially 28–31.

139. *Iliad* 9.343.

140. *Iliad* 9.344.

141. *Iliad* 19.56–64.

142. Arthur, “Divided World,” 25.

143. She apostrophizes him as “most pleasing to my wretched heart” and promises him to feel unending grief for his fate because she found him “always kind,” *Iliad* 19.287 and 300.

144. “Thus evil always comes next from evil for me,” *Iliad* 19.290.

145. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, note at lines 14–16.

146. The text for *Heroides* 3 is from Barchiesi’s commentary, *Epistulae Heroidum*. See introduction, note 1.

147. Ovid’s playfulness has been noted by Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *Heroides* 3, note at line 2.

148. *Ars Amatoria* 3.481–82. Farrell, “Reading and Writing,” 313, quotes these lines of the *Ars* to point out the Ovidian “motif of

women's linguistic foreignness," a motif he sees at play throughout *Heroides* 3.

149. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, suggests that the heroines of amorous epistolary discourse find in blood, tears and other physical manifestations of their suffering a valid symbolic system for expressing pain (36–37). Also see Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.* He argues for reading the lines ironically. Tears erase the words, but nevertheless speak more eloquently, more effectively, for Briseis, since she cannot express herself adequately in a language that is not her own.

150. See chapter 1, section entitled "Epistolary Expectations," 21 and note 30.

151. Barchiesi, "Problemi d'interpretazione," notes that by calling herself *munus* ("prize," line 20) near the beginning of the epistle Briseis recalls her appellation γέρας in the *Iliad* (80). See also the introduction to *Epistulae Heroidum*, 27, note 14.

152. *Iliad* 19.295 and 297, respectively.

153. See chapter 1, note 13.

154. See Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, commentary on *Heroides* 3, *passim*.

155. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, attempts to dismiss Briseis' demand that Achilles show himself a *cupidus amans* as one of the moments when Ovid's wit, much to the detriment of the composition, breaks through the illusion of the poem. This moment of "unconscious self-parody" (41), Jacobson remarks, leads to the failure of the entire poem.

156. Verducci, *Toyshop*, 88–121, aligns Briseis' use of elegiac elements with Ovid's wit as he creates literary parody by showing his heroine incapable of understanding Achilles' heroic code. In her astute observations of the poet's wit, Verducci passes over the reasons for, and the implications of, a woman's creating such a portrait of herself.

157. And an extremely elegiac one at that—she is described as a *molliis amica* ("soft/tender girlfriend" [114]).

158. This is surely a play on the concept of the elegiac hero as a lover rather than a fighter. Consider here Ovid's own witty formulation *militat omnis amans* ("every lover is a soldier," *Amores* 1.9.1). That very poem features the story of Briseis and Achilles as one *exemplum*, lines 33–34.

159. Again if one considers the "source text" there is more irony. The Homeric Achilles is in fact enjoying music and song, but the songs highlight the glorious deeds of heroes, and are not, as in the imagination of Ovid's heroine, the usual elegiac dinner-party fare—*Iliad* 9.189.

160. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, introduction, 28, and also at *Heroides* 3, lines 113–20.

161. These lines give critics pause; see Verducci, *Toyshop*, 106–7, especially p. 107 where she explains the textual emendations scholars

have suggested to remove the discomfort arising from the notion that Briseis would call the Trojans *hostes* (“enemies”).

162. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*, notes a comparison to Propertius 4.3.46: *essem militiae sarcina fida tuae* (“I would be a faithful burden to your soldiery”). Arethusa, writing to her husband Lycotas off on campaign, would similarly accept a position of minimal importance in return for the possibility of accompanying him. Barchiesi suggests that *sarcina* means “burden” rather than “baggage.”

163. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, offers a psychological explanation for her behavior, tracing her helplessness and her weakness to the trauma of her city's capture and of the death of her brothers and her father (25).

164. One should not pass over the Ovidian wit here, as the poet plays with elegiac terminology and convention. Indeed, in erotic elegy it is the *puella* (“girl”) who is the *domina* (“mistress”) and the poet-lover who is held in a state of *servitium* (“servitude”). Here Briseis plays on the gender role reversals; she is not the *puella*, but the poet-lover. See Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, introduction, 26–27.

165. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*, notes that Ovid alludes to the scene between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6.450–65, in which Hector imagines how Andromache will become a slave subject to humiliation if he should die and Troy should fall.

166. Briseis' past is similar to Andromache's; for Achilles killed the father and brothers of both women. Moreover, just as Briseis is now the captive of the man who conquered her city and killed her family, a similar future awaits Hector's wife: Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference and the Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 29. Also Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, introduction, 30.

167. Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 29.

168. *Iliad* 6.429–30: “Hector, you are my father, and my revered mother, and my brother, and you are my young husband.”

169. In her discussion of this poem Verducci, *Toyshop*, 110–11, rightly points out the allusion to the scene in which Andromache tenderly reveals to her husband that, because Achilles has destroyed her city and slain her family, her relationship with Hector encompasses every important relationship she has lost. But Verducci sees the allusion only as a display of Ovid's perverse wit because here Briseis expresses the sentiments to the very man responsible for the destruction of her family and her city. Barchiesi too notes the Homeric allusion, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*

170. *Iliad* 6.429.

171. *Iliad* 19.59ff.

172. For a complete and detailed discussion of the issues that raise concerns about non-Ovidian authorship of this poem, see Jacobson,

Ovid's *Heroides*, 228–34. He carefully dismantles the problems point by point. See also the fourth appendix of Casali, *Epistula IX*, 227–33, where he discusses the various reasons for questioning Ovidian authorship and points out their flaws.

173. The other challenges come from questions of meter and from the poetic catalogue, composed by Ovid, of heroines who write letters in the *Heroides*: *Amores* 2.18.21ff. Casali, *Epistula IX*, addresses and dismisses these challenges in appendix IV. For my views (with conclusions similar to Casali's) on the catalogue at *Amores* 2.18.21ff and whether Ovid must have listed *all* the heroines whose voices he took on in the text, see chapter 3, 138–39, where I consider the issue with reference to Sappho's epistle, *Heroides* 15.

174. Dörrie, "Die dichterische Absicht," calculates that Deianira dedicates 70 percent of the epistle to a complaint against Hercules, which culminates in his enslavement at the hands of Omphale (51–52).

175. For a complete discussion of the intertextual aspects of this poem, see Casali, *Epistula IX*, *passim*. For the importance of intertextuality in the *Heroides* in general, see the work of Barchiesi, Bessone, *Epistula XII*, Hinds, "Medea in Ovid," and Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode" and "Response."

176. For a complete discussion of the sources for *Heroides* 9, see Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 235–38. (Indeed, each chapter on the individual letters includes a discussion of the sources.) While he believes that comic portrayals of Hercules and especially of the tale of his enslavement to Omphale have a certain influence on Ovid's telling, he does conclude that Ovid's main source text is the *Trachiniae*. More significantly, see Casali, *Epistula IX*, *passim*, who argues that *Heroides* 9 reproduces the action of the entire Sophoclean tragedy in its 168 lines, and who points out the specific passages in the *Trachiniae* to which he believes the Ovidian Deianira alludes throughout her epistle.

177. Dorothea Wender, "The Will of the Beast: Sexual Imagery in the *Trachiniae*," *Ramus* 3 (1974): 4, describes Heracles' crippling fear of demanding women and thus, conversely, his attraction to weak ones (like Iole and Deianira).

178. Christina Elliott Sorum, "Monsters and the Family: the Exodos of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 19 (1978): 65. Similarly Zeitlin, "Playing the Other," observes that the tragedy highlights the sufferings of Heracles and that his character "provides the climax and resolution of the drama" (70).

179. See Sorum, "Monsters," 64. See also Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 97–98, and somewhat more harshly Zeitlin, "Playing the Other," 70.

180. Page duBois, *Sowing the Body. Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 73.

181. *Trachiniae*, 682–83.

182. Page duBois, "On Horse/Men, Amazons and Endogamy," *Arethusa* 12.1 (1979): 41–42.

183. See duBois, *Sowing the Body*, 165–66. She explains: "There is an assumption of an even more alienated set of metaphors for describing the female body . . . The metaphor of the tablet is the final logical moment in this process, a metaphor that emphasizes the passivity and receptivity of female interiority, that assumes that the mover of the stylus, the inscriber, the literate male who carves and marks the passive medium, alone has the power to generate the marks of the text, which will proliferate not on the tablet itself, but in the mind of the reader, who will again, himself alone, inscribe a new text on a tablet that has been erased, scraped clean."

184. Casali, *Epistula IX, passim*, argues that *Heroides* 9 recapitulates the action of the entire Sophoclean tragedy. He does not consider, however, how Ovid reproduces, in his Deianira, the extraordinarily passive character of the heroine, nor what light this portrayal casts on how Ovid constructs woman in this text.

185. See Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*

186. The text for *Heroides* 9 is Casali's, from his commentary, *Epistula IX*. See introduction, note 1.

187. Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*, without speaking of Deianira's passivity or marginality does note that Deianira uses *nostris* here to underscore her role as Hercules' wife.

188. See Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 239, footnote 34, and Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*

189. See above where I discuss the same phenomenon with regard to Penelope, 48–49 and note 126.

190. For this use of the verb *succumbo*, see Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*

191. These two moments of adultery are also juxtaposed in the *Trachiniae*. Lichas, the lying messenger who leads Iole to Deianira, tries to excuse Heracles' destruction of Iole's city by giving revenge as a justification. Iole's father, Eurytus, sold Heracles into the servitude of Omphale, 248ff. The second messenger corrects Lichas' story and gives Eros, or desire for Iole, as the true motivator, 351ff.

192. For a concise overview, see Casali's discussion, *Epistula IX*, appendix IV.

193. Here I agree with Casali that the stories of Omphale and Iole provide a key to reading *Heroides* 9, although we offer different reasons for the claim. In an intertextual approach to interpreting the epistle, he suggests that the stories of Omphale and Iole create what are perhaps

the most Ovidian touches in the poem. With wonderful (tragic) irony and foreshadowing, Deianira expresses her indignation at moments when Hercules *seems* to have been forced to his knees by other women when she herself—as the reader knows from Sophocles' *Trachiniae*—has just sent him the cloak that will *actually* overcome him. While not denying that Casali's clever observation lends a layer of interpretive richness to a reading of *Heroides* 9, I note once again that readings that focus on Ovidian wit tend to overlook the ways in which this portrayal of Deianira casts light on how the poet constructs the heroine in this poem and, more importantly, in the *Heroides* as a collection; see Casali, "Tragic Irony in Ovid, *Heroides* 9 and 11," *Classical Quarterly* 45.2 (1995): 505–11, as well as *Epistula IX*, *passim*.

194. Compare here Altman's reading of the opening letter of Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel, *Clarissa*: "It is not necessarily the voice that pronounces 'I' who captures our attention, as the opening letter of *Clarissa* teaches us. Anna Howe's first letter, like her subsequent ones, is so *you*-oriented that it establishes Clarissa once and for all as the chief protagonist in the narrative," *Epistolarity*, 120, emphasis hers.

195. My view differs from that of Jacobson who discerns not jealousy on the part of Deianira in her discussions of Iole and Omphale, but rather a fear that her own glory lessens as her husband's does. For this view, see Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 240–41.

196. See Casali, *Epistula IX*, especially for the lines concerning Omphale (lines 55–118) and Iole (lines 119–36). He considers how Deianira constructs Hercules as if he were an elegiac lover caught up in *servitium amoris* ("slavery of love") to his *domina* ("mistress").

197. "Therefore I am afraid of these things, namely lest Heracles be called my spouse but be the husband of the younger woman," *Trachiniae*, 550–51. Casali, *Epistula IX*, *ad loc.*, also notes this Ovidian departure from the source text.

198. *Trachiniae*, 298–302. Sorum, "Monsters," 63, notes how Deianira identifies especially with Iole.

199. *Trachiniae*, 540–44: "Heracles, called loyal and good to me, sent this payment for housekeeping [i.e., Iole] in return for a long time away. But I do not know how to be angry with that man, often sick with the same disease."

200. Dörrie, "Die dichterische Absicht," 52, believes that Deianira is concerned with the threat to her position as wife. This threat gains currency for her because for the first time she is compelled to deal with Hercules' adultery not as a distant rumor or story but as a fact that she looks upon with her own eyes.

201. Casali, *Epistula IX*, *ad loc.*, points out that the number of Hercules' labors was well-defined and not limitless. He argues that Deianira is being ironic here, mocking her husband.

202. This is surely also a playful reference to a familiar set of images in erotic elegy where the lover-poet is enslaved and conquered by his *puella*, or by Love. Deianira is carefully pointing out to Hercules that he has momentarily strayed into the wrong role, the wrong genre.

203. Heracles' servitude to Omphale surfaces only as the temporal antecedent to the sack of Oechalia and the enslavement of Iole, *Trachiniae*, 352–57. Certainly here we find an element of generic play as Ovid transposes tragedy into elegy. On one level Hercules' servitude to Omphale interests Ovid more than Sophocles because *servitium amoris*, the debasing enslavement of male lover-poet to his mistress, is a widely featured generic element in erotic elegy. See Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*

204. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 238, sees the thematic similarities of the two relationships in the idea of a vanquished Hercules, overpowered twice in a similar fashion by a woman.

205. The mention of the messenger's arrival to introduce new information during the letter-writing process has caused concern for many critics. It compels some to insist that the letter is not authentic, see Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 228, who himself dismisses this opinion. See also Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*, and appendix IV.

206. *Trachiniae*, 734ff.

207. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 236.

208. Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. Anthony Forster (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 8.

209. Loraux, *Tragic Ways*, 7.

210. Although lines 147–52 have been considered by some editors as spurious, there seems to be no compelling reason for removing them. See Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*

211. Consider Loraux's provocative observation: "To die with . . . A tragic way for a woman to go to the extreme limit of marriage, by, it must be said, drastically reordering events, since it is in death that 'living with' her husband will be achieved," *Tragic Ways*, 26. Also: "They are free enough to kill themselves, but they are not free enough to escape from the space to which they belong, and the remote sanctum where they meet their death [the *thalamos*] is equally the symbol of their life—a life that finds its meaning outside the self and is fulfilled only in the institutions of marriage and maternity, which tie women to the world and lives of men. It is by men that women meet their death, and it is for men, usually, that they kill themselves . . . Deianira [in the *Trachiniae*] dies *because* of Hyllus but *for* love of Heracles. So the death of women confirms or re-establishes their connection with marriage and maternity" (23, emphasis hers).

Casali, *Epistula IX*, note to line 145, and *ad loc.*, argues that when Deianira asks what her *furor* ("frenzy") has led her to do, the reader, encouraged by Ovid's choice of word, thinks of Heracles who, in the

mythological and textual tradition, was *furens* ("frenzied") when he killed his first wife and their children. Therefore, the reader notes the *double-entendre* when Deianira questions what she has done to prove herself the wife of Hercules. By killing a spouse through *furor*, she has, in fact, mimicked him, thus proving herself well and truly his wife. This intertextual reading demands that the full meaning of Deianira's words escape her and belong only to a witty game between the poet and the reader.

212. See Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*, and appendix IV.

213. These are the arguments of Casali, *Epistula IX, ad loc.*

214. Barchiesi, "Future Reflexive," 342, offers yet another reason for this self-representation: Deianira is *impia* because in Ovid's text she is hesitating in her acceptance of the outcome already laid out for her in the *Trachiniae*.

215. Casali, *Epistula IX*, points out the possible play on the etymology, note to line 146. Casali, however, sees Ovidian wit in this refrain. Because the heroine in the "source text" kills herself immediately and *in silence*, Ovid and his reader laugh at the prolix Ovidian heroine as the reader wonders why, indeed, Deianira is taking so long to complete the act of suicide.

216. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 240.

217. I am grateful here to Joe Farrell who helped me to formulate this notion more clearly.

2. Women into Woman

1. See chapter 1, section entitled "Epistolary Expectations," 24–28.

2. See chapter 1, section entitled "Penelope to Ulysses: *Heroides* 1," 43–44.

3. See chapter 1, section entitled "Briseis to Achilles: *Heroides* 3," 57.

4. See chapter 1, section entitled "Deianira to Hercules: *Heroides* 9," 74.

5. See introduction, note 5.

6. See introduction, note 6.

7. Farrell, "Reading and Writing," points especially to similarities between the *Heroides* and the *Ars Amatoria*.

8. Pace Spoth, *Heroides als Elegien*, who, in reading the *Heroides* as elegies, insists that such an interpretation precludes any consideration of the text as an exploration of the feminine. Cf. Alessandro Barchiesi, review of *Ovid's Heroides als Elegien* by Friedrich Spoth in *Atene e Roma* (1994): 111–12.

9. While his *Seminar XX, Encore*, represents Lacan's culminating contribution to the study of desire and the relations between the sexes,

his engagement with the issue of desire spans his career. *Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, from fourteen years earlier, already showcases many of his thoughts on Man, Woman, and desire, and his doctoral thesis (“De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité”) explores the relationship between desire and psychotic paranoia.

10. See Lacan on the obsessive and the hysteric in “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 292–325.

11. Of course the *locus classicus* for this is the myth told by Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium*, 189c–93d.

12. Lacan, *Seminar XX, Encore*, 9. Similarly, consider: “I will continue with what I have to say to you today, namely, to further articulate the consequence of the fact that no relationship gets constituted between the sexes in the case of speaking beings,” from “God and Woman’s Jouissance,” chapter 6 of *Seminar XX, Encore*, 66.

13. For the next few paragraphs I use “it” here as a gender-neutral pronoun simply to avoid the cumbersome and somewhat distracting “he/she” or “him/her.”

14. Lacan, *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), especially chapter 16, “The Subject and the Other: Alienation,” 203–15, and chapter 17, “The Subject and the Other: Aphanisis,” 216–29.

15. “What provokes anxiety? Contrary to what people say, it is neither the rhythm nor the alternation of the mother’s presence-absence. What proves this is that the child indulges in repeating presence-absence games: security of presence is found in the possibility of absence. What is most anxiety-producing for the child is when the relationship through which he comes to be—on the basis of lack which makes him desire—is most perturbed: when there is no possibility of lack, when his mother is constantly on his back.” From Lacan, *Seminar X, L’angoisse*, unpublished, quoted in Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 53.

16. In some of his writings Lacan distinguishes between alienation as the subject’s emergence in language and separation, which refers to the subject’s apprehension of the mother’s lack and his/her wish to fill it. See, for example, chapter 16, “The Subject and the Other: Alienation,” in *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

17. Lacan explains the paternal metaphor (the Name-of-the-Father) in “On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” in *Ecrits*, 179–225.

18. Consider here the cogent explanation of Fink: “The intrusion may take the form of a prohibition of its [the child’s] monopoly rights to its mother, which forces its interest to seek beyond her the source of the prohibition, the source of its mother’s fascination—her boyfriend, lover, husband, family, neighbors, state, law, religion, God: something which may be totally undefinable and yet quintessentially fascinating,” *The Lacanian Subject*, note 12, 185.

19. Lacan opens *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, chapter 20, “In You More Than You,” 263–76, with the enigmatic “I love in you something more than you” (263).

20. Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 66.

21. For Lacan the subject, in the “best” possible scenario, “accepts” castration as a sort of forced choice.

22. See Lacan, “Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire,” in *Ecrits*, 292–325, and also *Seminar XX, Encore*.

23. “I stressed this last time, when I told you that the human being has always to learn from scratch from the Other what he has to do, as man or as woman,” Lacan, *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, chapter 16, “The Subject and the Other: Alienation,” 204.

24. See chapter 2, note 10.

25. See “A Love Letter,” chapter 7 of *Seminar XX, Encore*, 80. Also here see the quotation from chapter 2, note 19 where it appears in incomplete form. The entire sentence is “I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you—the objet petit a—I mutilate you.” By his relationship to “objet a” the masculine subject negates and therefore “mutilates” his partner, denying her status as desiring subject in her own right. Her desire, as well as his, becomes impossible. Although in the context of a heterosexual, erotic relationship the verb “mutilate” takes on a metaphorical meaning, as Renata Salecl has shown in her analysis of the crimes of the Soviet serial murderer/mutilator, Andrei Chikatilo, serial murderers operate according to the same principles articulated by Lacan regarding “normal” relations between the sexes, but render literal the metaphorical mutilation of the beloved. See *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Freedom After the Fall of Socialism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 104–11.

26. “‘Everything for the other,’ says the obsessive, and that is what he does, for being in the perpetual whirlwind of destroying the other, he can never do enough to ensure that the other continues to exist,” Lacan, *Seminar VIII, Transference*, 241, as quoted in Fink, *Clinical Introduction*, 118.

27. Again here see “A Love Letter,” from Lacan’s *Seminar XX, Encore*.

28. Just as the masculine subject constructs an impossible desire for both parties to the relationship (see chapter 2, note 25), so the feminine subject struggles to keep both her own and her partner's desire forever in play and therefore unsatisfied.

29. Here see Lacan, "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power," in *Ecrits*, 226–80, especially section 5, entitled "Desire Must Be Taken Literally," 257–77, where Lacan discusses the dream/desire of the butcher's wife, an example that Freud discusses in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 180–84. For an excellent discussion of the Lacanian treatment of the butcher's wife, see Colette Soler, "Hysteria and Obsession," in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 248–82.

30. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Ecrits*, 1–7.

31. One should note here that while I am discussing the Imaginary as separate from the Symbolic, in fact the registers of experience are ineluctably interwoven. The Imaginary must always be structured by the Symbolic, as my example in the previous paragraph (with baby and parents) indicates, since the specular image and language are intertwined. See Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 1, and also *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 91–92.

32. See chapter 2, 87, and note 29.

33. Here see Lacan, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits*, 8–29.

34. Lacan, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits*, 22.

35. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, in the introductory material to his commentary on *Heroides* 2, remarks that the lack of narrative material particularly unique to her situation makes Phyllis' story seem representative of a general paradigm of "The Abandoned Woman" (107).

36. The notion appears in Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982), 84, and is taken up again in the "Seminar of 21 January 1975," in *Feminine Sexuality*, 169–70. In a similar vein, consider his further question: "For what is love other than banging one's head against a wall, since there is no sexual relation?" (170).

37. Lacan, *Seminar XX, Encore*, 72.

38. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, commentary on *Heroides* 2, the letter of Phyllis, *passim*, carefully documents the various allusions in this epistle. He suggests the tantalizing possibilities of allusive references to the story of Phyllis and Demophoon in Callimachus, from which only one line remains today.

39. While Catullus 64 is the principal “source text” for *Heroides* 10, Peter Knox, “Ariadne on the Rocks: Influences on Ovid, *Her*, 10,” in *Style and Tradition: Studies in Honor of Wendell Clausen* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998), 72–83, argues that Ovid (like Catullus before him), also drew on material from a Hellenistic narrative poem on the subject of Ariadne’s abandonment by Theseus that is no longer extant.

40. Catullus 64, 143–47:

nunc iam nulla viro iuranti femina credat,
 nulla viri speret sermones esse fideles;
 quis dum aliquid cupiens animus praegestit apisci,
 nil metuunt iurare, nihil promittere parcunt:
 sed simul ac cupidae mentis satiata libido est,
 dicta nihil metuere, nihil periuria curant.

[Now let no woman trust a man, even when he is swearing an oath; let no woman hope that the words of a man are true. While any desiring [male] soul has been eager to obtain anything, they fear not at all to swear, and they spare nothing in promising. But as soon as the desire of an eager mind has been satiated, they fear that which they spoke not at all, they care not at all about perjury.]

41. These lines have caused problems for editors of the text. Palmer writes that “The distich, which is entirely otiose, seems spurious,” as quoted by Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.* Knox shares Palmer’s view, calling the couplet a “statement of the obvious” and questioning the Latinity of *recordor*. He ventures the suggestion that these lines might have originally been comments in the margins that were interpolated into the text. Verducci, however, accepts the couplet as genuine, employing it as significant evidence in her argument that Ariadne is Ovid’s “purest parody” of the figure of the abandoned woman, *Toyshop*, 246. To me, the sentiment expressed in these lines seems more counter-intuitive than “obvious;” after all, it is somewhat strange that Ariadne, at the moment of her abandonment, can view her situation with enough critical distance to perceive connections between her lot and the lot of other similarly abandoned women. Not only do the lines contain, in true Ovidian spirit, a witty and playful recasting of Catullus 64.143–47 (chapter 2, note 40), but more importantly these lines draw attention to a fact significant for the interpretation of all the heroines in this collection, namely the haunting similarity of the women.

42. For possible emendations, see Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*

43. Ovid himself intertextually reinforces Aeneas’ penchant to forge similarities between his various “women.” In book 3 of the *Fasti*, Aeneas entrusts Anna, sister of Dido who is now dead, to his new wife, Lavinia.

In fact, when Aeneas suggests that Lavinia love Anna “in the manner of a dear sister” (*quam, precor, ut carae more sororis ames*, 632), he threatens amalgamation of Lavinia and Dido.

44. Barchiesi, “Future Reflexive,” notes that although one might think of Dido’s own appearance to Aeneas in the Underworld, in fact, the language echoes the appearance of Creusa’s ghost to Aeneas as he tells the story in *Aeneid* 2. Slyly Barchiesi suggests: “He [Aeneas] could even have problems in distinguishing the two revenants” (339).

45. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*

46. This is the opinion of Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *Heroides* 2, *passim*, although, to be fair, he sees Ovid playfully constructing a dialogue between the naïveté of Phyllis in love and sophistication of Demophoon who possesses the highly developed skills that Ovid stresses in his other amatory works as essential for the lover. Demophoon seems to have taken to heart the instructions of the Ovidian *praeceptor amoris* in the *Ars Amatoria*: *est tibi agendus amans* (“you must act the part of the lover,” *Ars Amatoria* 1.611).

47. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*, discusses the proposed emendation of Burman from *cornua cum lunae pleno semel orbe coissent* (“when *once* the horns of the moon had come together in a full circle”) to *cornua cum lunae pleno quater orbe coissent* (when *four times* the horns of the moon had come together in a full circle). Barchiesi also prefers *semel*, but because he feels that waiting four times longer than the promised time before complaining underscores the naïveté of Phyllis about her abandonment.

48. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, line 81, notes that Ovid has several literary precedents for Phyllis here. He mentions Nausicaa’s fear of drawing the censure of her people for choosing a foreign suitor (*Odyssey* 6.275–81), Medea’s similar fear as she considers whether to kill herself rather than help Jason, thus revealing her love for him (*Argonautica* 3.791ff), and the famous rebuke of Dido to Aeneas that by choosing him as her lover she made herself odious to her own people as well as to the people of surrounding lands because she had refused their princes’ hands in marriage (*Aeneid* 4.320ff).

49. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, lines 121–30, compares Phyllis at this moment to Ariadne in Catullus 64 and also proposes allusions to Callimachus’ now-lost version of the story of Phyllis and Demophoon. He suggests that perhaps there existed a paradigm of the abandoned heroine on the shore.

50. *Aeneid* 4 323–24: *cui me moribundam deseris hospes / (hoc solum nomen quoniam de coniuge restat)?* (“To whom do you abandon me, who am about to die, guest, since this name alone remains from husband?”) We should note, however, that in Ovid’s version Dido makes

a significant alteration. For the Virgilian Dido, Aeneas, by the nature of his actions, has transformed himself into a stranger, or a “guest.” Conversely, the Ovidian Dido is offering to change her own status.

51. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, especially introductory remarks to *Heroides* 2, as well as discussions at lines 1, 74, and 147, proposes that the one line we have from Callimachus’ version of the story of Phyllis suggests that this telling lingers in the intertextual background for Virgil’s Dido as well as the heroines of *Heroides* 2 and 7.

52. My interpretation here directly opposes the line Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, takes on *Heroides* 10. He argues that for Ariadne love is dead, and the heroine holds out no hope of reviving it (225–26).

53. Unlike Palmer, *Heroides*, Dörrie, *Heroides*, and Grant Showerman, *Ovid: Heroides and Amores*, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), Knox prints *inscribende*, a conjecture Daniel Heinsius makes in his seventeenth-century edition of the text. For the purposes of my argument Knox’s choice is quite tantalizing since the apostrophe *inscribende*—“you who must be inscribed”—for Demophoon nicely captures the urgency with which Phyllis insists on their being joined together verbally.

54. It is interesting to note that, in a similar vein, Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, line 106ff, considers a strangely long and developed series of clauses that feature an alternation of relative pronouns, now referring to Phyllis, now to Demophoon, as a linguistic projection of Phyllis’ desire for closeness between herself and Demophoon.

55. For a discussion of the sources, see Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, 58–62, and Knox, *Select Epistles*, 111–13.

56. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, lines 45 and 111, argues against Jacobson’s suggestion that Ovid alters the portrayal of Phyllis as she appears in the sources in order to construct a striking resemblance between Phyllis and Dido. (See Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, especially 60, note 72, and 62ff.) Barchiesi cautions us not to exclude the possibility that there existed Greek sources that offered a portrayal of Phyllis on which Ovid draws in a faithful fashion.

57. Here compare Medea who similarly designates herself *regina* while her father ruled Colchis. See chapter 2, 126, and note 111.

58. *Aeneid* 1.364. Indeed, for many readers, Virgil’s text stands as the sole point of reference according to which *Heroides* 7 can be interpreted. On the one hand, some scholars use a comparison between Dido’s epistle and *Aeneid* 4 in order to show Ovid’s “poetic failure,” Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, 76. Others see Ovid setting out to create a “separate but equal” version of Dido in *Heroides* 7. See Joachim Adamietz, “Zu Ovids Dido-Brief,” *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 10 (1984): 121–34. Or consider William S. Anderson, “The *Heroides*,” in

Ovid, ed. J. W. Binns (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 55. Conversely, others argue that the Ovidian Dido offers a successful re-reading of her Virgilian counterpart, an alternate version of the epic text interpreted from a more personal, more individual, more “female” point of view. As an example, see Marilyn Desmond, “When Dido Reads Vergil: Gender and Intertextuality in Ovid’s *Heroides* 7,” *Helios* 20.1 (1993): 56–68. Desmond believes that through Dido “Ovid explores the implications of a gender-based understanding of Vergil’s narrative” (56–57).

59. In a note that bolsters my interpretation, Knox, *Select Epistles*, lines 115–16, observes that the Ovidian Dido tells the story of her departure from home by echoing the exact words Aeneas uses in book 3 of the *Aeneid*, lines 10–11, to describe his exodus from Troy.

60. I read *rudis* as an accusative plural. Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, reads *rudis* as a nominative singular that means “one untrained for war” and “reinforc[es] *femina*.” This would produce the translation “and I, untrained for war, hardly make ready my city walls and my army.” This reading, it seems to me, springs from a presupposition that Dido never presents herself as a queen, instead merely as a woman in love; cf. Anderson, “The *Heroides*,” 64–65, and Adamietz, “Zu Ovids Dido-Brief,” 134.

61. Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, suggests that the ablative absolute, *ambage remissa*, verbally plays on the meaning “wanderings” but, in fact, here is a colloquial expression signifying “with no more beating around the bush.” The possibility that Dido speaks so forcefully as she emphasizes her strength is tantalizing.

62. Interpreters of the *Heroides* have noticed the discrepancies and have variously sought to explain them. Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, notes about Phyllis’ epistle: “It is, to a large extent, a study in paradox, not the least of which is the Catullan *odi et amo* (“I hate and I love”) with the *odium*, however, sharply toned down to *ira* (“anger”). . . . Broadly speaking, the poem revolves around the coexistence of apparently incompatible and (*logically*) mutually exclusive emotions” (66, emphasis his). Anderson, “The *Heroides*,” also notices, in Dido’s case, a tension within the epistle between two emerging portraits of the queen but considers one to be Dido in the manner she attempts to describe herself and the second to be Dido as she emerges to the reader despite her self-description. Anderson’s argument, that there exists some “real” and knowable (or known) version of the heroine that she attempts to cover over in presenting herself otherwise, is a popular one, and underlies many intertextual readings, especially, as we shall see, Verducci’s interpretations of Medea and Hypsipyle in *Toyshop* (see my chapter 2, 115–17).

63. *Aeneid* 4.93–95. See Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*

64. See chapter 2, 96.

65. *Aeneid* 4.166–68.

66. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, lines 117–20, notes the Virgilian allusion. He takes it farther, reminding us of Allecto's role in the *Aeneid* as destroyer of marriage, comparing Phyllis' *Tisiphone pronuba* to Virgil's twin *Juno pronuba* (4.166) and *Bellona pronuba* (7.319), and suggesting an affinity between Phyllis' solitary bird and the use of the owl as a symbol of death in *Aeneid* 4.

67. See Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 62ff.

68. Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum*, *ad loc.*, notes the allusion to the scene at *Aeneid* 4.391–92. He points out that when Ovid retells the story of Phyllis in the *Remedia Amoris*, Phyllis is alone on the seashore, without attendants. In *Heroides* 2, then, the similarities on this point between Dido and Phyllis seem quite deliberate.

69. Anderson makes an observation about line 4 of *Heroides* 7—*adverso movimus ista deo* ("I wrote these things with the god against me")—that corroborates my line of argument, "The *Heroides*" (50–51). He argues that while the god who opposes Dido is in fact Cupid, the god of love, in a broader sense, however, because of the way in which the heroine seems to be praying to her addressee in the opening of the poem, an addressee who remains unnamed at this point, the reader is tempted to conflate *deus* and addressee. The ambiguity remains for the reader even after learning that the addressee is the mortal Aeneas.

70. See Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*

71. Adamietz, "Zu Ovids Dido-Brief," notes that Dido chooses to portray herself as lacking and weak. He believes that she adopts such a pose as a tactic to persuade Aeneas to return (134), but he offers no reason why Dido might believe that this sort of tactic will lead to success.

72. See Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, who chooses the emendation proposed by A. E. Houseman.

73. Discussion about Ovid's recasting of Dido's words at *Aeneid* 4.328–30 often leads to a condemnation of the Ovidian heroine. R. G. Austin accuses her of vulgarity in *P. Vergili Maronis: Aeneidos Liber Quartus*, ed. R. G. Austin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) *ad loc.*; N. P. Gross, "Rhetorical Wit and Amatory Persuasion in Ovid," *Classical Journal* 74 (1979): 311, believes that the Ovidian Dido betrays a selfish and exploitative attitude toward Aeneas; Adamietz, "Zu Ovids Dido-Brief," 129, and Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 84, both claim that she seeks to manipulate Aeneas into returning, although their explanations for how this ploy is supposed to function differ significantly from mine.

74. Verducci, *Toyshop*, sees Ovidian wit in Ariadne's description of herself as *frigida*. Reading literally, she notes: "We are reminded that,

after all, if Ariadne is *frigida* it is because she has, with the inexperienced desperation of a Sea Scout on a survival mission, hung her clothes on the nearest tree, where they beckon in the wind to the heedless and escaping Theseus" (251).

75. Again Verducci offers a literal reading of Ariadne's self-description as *femina periuri fraude sepulta viri* ("a woman buried by the deceit of a perjured man") followed so closely by her catalogue of ways to die. The hyperbole, the proliferation of possible ways to die, leads Verducci to write about Ariadne's "death desire" as comedy full of "sheer irrelevance and gratuitous brilliance" (273). Consider 274–75, where she notes that "the remainder of the passage [the catalogues of deaths] challenges Ariadne's own elegiac hyperbole: no woman already *sepulta*, dead by grieving, could hypothesize so carefully her own literal dying."

76. This hyperbole, certainly present in Ariadne's self-portrait, leads Verducci, *Toyshop*, to claim that Ovid parodies the literary paradigm of the abandoned woman by means of this heroine. Other interpreters condemn Ovid, insisting that hyperbole is born from the poet's failure in his attempts to outdo a literary predecessor, here Catullus. For example, see Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 220. Once again, this interpretation stems from highlighting the relationship between poet and reader, rather than considering what the hyperbole means in the context of the heroine's self-definition.

77. In her discussion of Ariadne's address of her bed, Verducci, *Toyshop*, perceptively observes: "Ovid has turned Catullus' ecphrasis inside-out and upside-down. His Ariadne is, quite literally, a deserted maiden sitting on a bedspread on a bed while addressing the bedspread of that selfsame bed" (267). The *Heroides* offer many instances of the poet enjoying such clever and ironic twists; consider for example Kennedy's observation in "The Epistolary Mode" that the stranger Penelope is about to entrust with *Heroides* 1 must in fact be none other than Ulysses, discussed in chapter 1, 39, and note 101.

78. Knox, *Select Epistles*, notes, *ad loc.*, that Ovid here puts in Ariadne's mouth words that belong to Medea in the literary tradition. Ariadne points out that even if she were to escape from Dia, she would have nowhere to turn since she has betrayed her homeland and her family. It is interesting to note once again, as Ariadne portrays herself through echoes to another abandoned woman at her moment of extreme weakness, how the heroines' lack of individuality is underscored.

79. A pioneering text is Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975). I have chosen here to use a deconstructionist rather than a strictly Lacanian concept of the gaze. (For a discussion of the differences between the two, see Slavoj

Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991], chapter 6, entitled “Pornography, Nostalgia, Montage: A Triad of the Gaze,” 107–22.) I explain my choice to shift theoretical perspectives here in two ways. First, although he chooses to focus his attention on the object of the gaze, while deconstructionists are more interested in the subject, nevertheless Lacan’s analysis of the gaze implicitly recognizes the oppositional positions of viewer and viewed. (See his introduction to the concept of the gaze, *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 109.) Thus, since it is not fundamentally incompatible with Lacanian thought, I make use of the deconstructionists’ more fully fleshed out discussion of the gaze from the side of the subject in order to explore the relationship Ariadne posits between herself and the visual. Second, I shall take the concepts elucidated through deconstructionist interpretation and integrate them, in the following pages, with the Lacanian perspective from which I read the *Heroides*. Ultimately, Ariadne’s exploitation of the medium of sight will be yet another way she attempts to make herself into what Theseus desires.

80. See Verducci, *Toyshop*, 249.

81. This strange manner of self-presentation as a collection of disconnected body parts strikes all readers of this text. Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, offers an explanation that highlights the poet’s attempt at psychological realism. Ariadne behaves mechanically, like an automaton because of her grief (223–24). Verducci, *Toyshop*, takes up the opposite stance; Ariadne’s vain discussion of her appearance represents comic parody of the highest order on the part of the poet. See her chapter entitled “Ariadne in Extremis,” 244–85.

82. Verducci, *Toyshop*, argues that in these lines the wit of the poet overpowers the heroine by means of “trivialization through excessive amplification” (250). Here the poet mocks the convention of female be-reavement through Ariadne.

83. Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, notes how surprising the adjective *puellares* seems to the reader. He asserts that Ovid “sacrifices verisimilitude” at this moment. In fact, one might argue that the adjective “girlish” is well in line with the rest of Ariadne’s self-construction as helpless. Indeed, she refers to herself as a *puella* (“girl”) at line 118.

84. Verducci, *Toyshop*, notes that vases and paintings depict Ariadne with long, flowing, at times disheveled hair. Verducci also points out that the poets Homer, Hesiod, Theocritus, and Catullus frequently describe the heroine with an epithet that refers to her beautiful or blonde tresses (247). See also Knox, *Select Epistles*, at line 16.

85. Verducci, *Toyshop*, refuses to take seriously this line or the following verses in which the heroine describes herself—disheveled, crying,

and clinging to a rock as she writes her epistle. Firmly believing in the spirit of pure parody that she sees as all-pervasive in this poem, Verducci asks rhetorically: "If Ariadne is clinging to a rock, how can she be writing? If she is clinging to the wave-tossed rock in a real landscape, must not the reader reflect that her clothing is more probably drenched with real sea spray than with enough elegiac tears to make her *tunicas* ['undergarments'] not merely damp but *sicut ab imbre gravis* ['heavy as if from rain']? If Theseus is still at sea and if, moreover, he cannot possibly receive correspondence from a deserted island bereft of even insufficient mail service, how can he possibly envision her present state of distraction *non oculis, sed mente* ['not with his eyes, but with his mind']?" (253). Similarly, though with somewhat less humor, see Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet Between Two Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), 38, and Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*

86. In a similar fashion, although with comparatively tempered enthusiasm, Dido too conjures herself up for Aeneas as passive visual object, attempting thus to render herself the cause of her addressee's desire. Nearing the end of her epistle, she offers a brief description of herself sitting with the pen in one hand and the sword he gave to her in the other. She then wishes *aspicias utinam quae sit scribentis imago* ("would that you could see what the appearance of the one writing is" [183]), offering herself up as an object for Aeneas' viewing pleasure.

87. Verducci, *Toyshop*, 33–85.

88. Verducci, *Toyshop*, 66.

89. Verducci, *Toyshop*, 80. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, astutely observes that "Ovid advances a Medea who makes a futile attempt at 'apologia,' a whitewash which does not prevent us from seeing that the naïve but virtuous Medea never existed; she appears as such only in Medea's distorted self-image" (119). Jacobson also notes that "the Medea of the distant past is constantly opposed by the Medea of the present, and we are never allowed to separate the one from the other" (118). He does not, however, adequately explain why she struggles to see/depict herself the way she does. A second, popular reading of the letter from Medea to Jason offers a similar explanation for Medea's split personality, but now in terms of genre. On the one hand, the elegiac framework of the epistle determines that Medea tries to construct herself as the "lover-poet" according to the elegiac code. On the other hand, the argument runs, Medea is by nature a character who belongs to tragedy. At important moments throughout the epistle, and especially at its conclusion, the elegiac framework remains incapable of completely representing Medea; her tragic self (by generic definition at odds with her elegiac self), her "real self," breaks through. This genre-based reading dominates the two recent commentaries

on *Heroides* 12 by Bessone, *Epistula XII*, and Theodor Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief*.

90. This recalls “Demetrius’” assertion that a letter is the image of the writer’s soul as well as our discussion of the fictional nature of epistolary self-representation. See chapter 1, section entitled “Epistolary Expectations,” 22–25.

91. See chapter 2, 87.

92. In their focus on Hypsipyle’s fascination with Medea, interpreters seem to overlook that she is so consumed with thoughts about the Colchian princess precisely because Jason has chosen Medea as his new object of desire. See Verducci, *Toyshop*, who states: “If, as Hypsipyle claims, Medea rules Jason, she dominates Hypsipyle’s thoughts no less, almost entirely effacing the presence of Jason in the poem” (58, emphasis mine). Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, writes: “Most of her arguments are self-unveiling or in a sense self-persuading. They vindicate her own position or affirm her own importance—to herself” (104, emphasis mine).

93. See Verducci, *Toyshop*, 61–62.

94. Verducci, *Toyshop*, writes with amusement: “Nevertheless, the full career of Medea is represented, however darkly at times, in the epistle of Hypsipyle. Indeed, one is almost tempted to imagine that Hypsipyle’s Thessalian informant either spoke far more voluminously on the topic of her Colchian rival than she claims he did, or that the same informant lightened his equipage by leaving behind him several volumes of Greek literature. His donation would have included, at the very least, two works: the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes and Euripides’ play *Medea*” (59). Stephen Hinds, “Medea in Ovid,” also notes Hypsipyle’s obsession with Medea (27).

95. Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, believes that Hypsipyle expresses concern about Medea’s witchcraft and her foreign ways because she herself is crippled with worry over how Jason’s liaison with a barbarian sorceress effects her own public image; his preference for Medea brings public shame upon Hypsipyle (98). Jacobson argues that Hypsipyle’s letter reveals the heroine’s arrogance. She pretends to be a loving, long suffering woman abandoned by her husband, all the while barely veiling the real reason for her pain: the injury Jason’s actions have done to her pride and sense of importance. Verducci too, *Toyshop*, speaks of Hypsipyle’s bourgeois sense of outrage at Medea’s behavior. She argues that Hypsipyle tries to promote this sense of outrage in order to veil over other more salient features of her personality that render her indistinguishable from Medea.

96. Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, wants to remove the lines that explicitly name Ariadne and Bacchus. He believes they are an interpolation to explain Hypsipyle’s use of the epithet Minoan to modify her father,

when she calls herself the daughter of Minoan Thoas (114). Even if these lines containing the explanation are expunged, however, the simple use of the epithet “Minoan,” even without further elucidation, will prod a reader to draw out Hypsipyle’s family tree, and make the connection to Ariadne and Bacchus.

97. Gianpiero Rosati, “Il parto maledetto di Medea (Ovidio, *Her.* 6, 156s.),” *Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici* 21 (1988): 305, footnote 3, believes that Hypsipyle in fact takes on the personality traits of Medea by the end of the epistle, and therefore sees a similarity between the two heroines on the question of sending children to a step-mother rather than the difference between Hypsipyle who seeks to preserve her sons’ lives at the expense of her own happiness and Medea who will kill her sons for the sake of revenge.

98. Bessone, *Epistula XII*, line 50, discusses the different interpretations that Hypsipyle and Medea offer of the story of Jason’s trials. Knox, *Select Epistles, Heroides* 6, *ad loc.*, makes the interesting observation that when the reader first hears Hypsipyle’s version of Jason’s feats s/he must wonder whether the Lemnian woman even knows about Medea since Hypsipyle is so pointedly silent on the topic of her rival.

99. *Heroides* 10.25ff.

100. *Heroides* 13.17–20. Similarly also Oenone in *Heroides* 5.55–56.

101. Here again I disagree with Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*. He believes that the fact that Hypsipyle did not kill her father leads her now to take upon herself the characteristics of murderess. Hypsipyle, who could not kill her father, has a “feminine nature,” while Medea, who has no similar scruples about committing murder, possesses a “masculine nature.” For Jacobson, it is hatred that causes Hypsipyle to want to become like Medea, because Medea, *qua* male, has succeeded with Jason, whereas Hypsipyle, *qua* female, has not (106).

102. Bessone, *Epistula XII*, line 46, similarly notes Hypsipyle’s uses of *devoveo*. Bessone asserts that Hypsipyle is taking on Medea’s character traits, but does not explain why the heroine would attempt such a transformation.

103. See most recently Peter E. Knox, “Ovid’s *Medea* and the Authenticity of *Heroides* 12,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 90 (1986): 207–23, who draws on the methods of Axelson and Ovid’s catalogue of the *Heroides* in *Amores* 2.18 to bolster his claims. Hinds, “Medea in Ovid,” 32–34, rebuts Knox’s claims that Medea is not mentioned in *Amores* 2.18, suggesting that line 23, usually thought to refer to Hypsipyle, actually refers to Medea. It is Medea after all, Hinds argues, who would be most likely to call Jason *male gratus* (“ungrateful”), in fact tagging him with the epithet *ingratus* (“ungrateful”) three times in *Heroides* 12, lines 21, 124, 206. For a similar opinion, with reference to Hinds, see

J. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores. Text, Prolegomena, and Commentary* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998), 3: commentary to 2.18.23–24.

104. See Hinds, "Medea in Ovid." Theodor Heinze, "The Authenticity of Ovid *Heroides* 12 Reconsidered," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 38 (1991–1993): 94–97, also refutes many of Knox's central claims against Ovidian authorship.

105. Especially Hinds, "Medea in Ovid," Bessone, *Epistula XII, passim*, and Heinze *Der XII. Heroidenbrief, passim*.

106. Hinds, "Medea in Ovid," 30. He argues that Ovid's merging of the two heroines replicates a similar movement in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*.

107. The text is from Bessone, *Epistula XII*. See Introduction, note 1.

108. Verducci, *Toyshop*, explains that this portrait of Medea is unique in its joining together of the disparate demeanors of the innocent Medea overpowered by love in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* with the woman capable of killing her own children for revenge in Euripides' tragedy. Conversely, Andrew R. Dyck, "On the Way From Colchis to Corinth: Medea in Book 4 of the *Argonautica*," *Hermes* 117.3 (1989): 455, argues that a double portrait of Medea as "ingénue and witch," emerges already in Apollonius' text. Bessone, *Epistula XII, passim*, argues that through the heroine of *Heroides* 12 Ovid demonstrates how similar the Medea driven by love and the Medea driven by revenge actually are.

109. Bessone, *Epistula XII, ad loc.*, argues that the oxymoron vanishes if one reads the line as an intertextual allusion to Euripides' *Medea*, 263–66, where Medea insists that while a woman is usually weak by nature, she has a great capacity to do evil when her marriage is threatened. And yet, Bessone also notes that *femina nocens* anticipates the phrase Medea uses about the daughters of Pelias who kill their father believing all the while that they are rejuvenating him. Medea says of them: *pietate nocentes* ("causing harm because of piety" [131]). To me, the echo suggests that Medea is attempting to liken herself to these women and also to another young woman, of whom the intertextual reader is aware, a woman who will also unwittingly kill her father: Creusa, Jason's new bride. The oxymoron, then, to my mind, remains firmly in play.

110. Here I take a position opposed to that of Bessone, *Epistula XII*, line 25, who sees as one of the consciously constructed Ovidian parallels between *Heroides* 6 and 12 the fact that Hypsipyle remains unaware of Creusa (Jason's final partner) while Medea remains ignorant of Hypsipyle (Jason's first partner).

111. Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief, ad loc.*, makes this nice observation, although he then claims that here *regina* means "princess," citing the *OLD* s.v. 1b, and using the parallel Medea later draws between herself and Creusa (25ff) as evidence for his assertion.

112. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 117, points out that Medea's first portrayal of the labors set out before Jason, described in vivid, negative adjectives (41–52), cannot be a direct report of the injunction set upon the hero by Aeetes but rather are the words as Medea the "love-struck girl" hears them.

113. Compare Phyllis' similar claim about her own abandonment, *Heroides* 2.45–48, and chapter 2, 99–100.

114. at non te fugiens sine me, germane, reliqui!

deficit hoc uno littera nostra loco.

quod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere dextra (113–15)

[But in my flight I did not leave you behind, brother, without me! My letter fails in this one place. What my right hand dared to do, it does not dare to write.]

115. Consider Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, who writes that Medea's killing of her brother represents "a severe divergence in the 'Apollonian' section from Apollonius' narrative" (110). Bessone, *Epistula XII, ad loc.*, notes that in the *Argonautica* it is Jason who kills Medea's brother and scatters his limbs at sea. Further, Bessone observes that even in most self-narrated versions of her story (*Argonautica*, Book 4.730ff and *Medea* 475ff) Medea knows to leave this episode out because it does not speak to her own advantage. Bessone argues, however, that in having Medea choose the variant in which she kills her brother Ovid is pointing to the similarities between what the young Medea did to win Jason and her later crimes.

116. When I highlight Medea's self-representation as an uncompromisingly powerful woman, capable of any crime, however monstrous, I part company with some other readers. Consider, for example, that Verducci, *Toyshop*, praises *Heroides* 12 as "Ovid's novel and sympathetic portrait of human self-deception, deranged and self-destroying love" (73). V. A. Tracy, "Penelope and Medea in the *Heroides*," *Echos du monde classique* 16 (1972): 45, dismisses Medea's threats, asserting that *Heroides* 12 reproduces a version of Apollonius' Medea, the occasional glimpse of the Euripidean heroine notwithstanding.

Hinds, "Medea in Ovid," Bessone, *Epistula XII, ad loc.*, and Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief, ad loc.*, all hear references to tragedy in these lines (208–12). Hinds argues that there is an etymological play in the *ingentes minae* ("monstrous threats") of Medea; *ingens* breaks down to *in* + *gens*, "within and against the family." Ovid, through the mouthpiece of his heroine, ironically signals Medea's future career on the tragic stage and the crimes she will commit against her family (41 with footnote 71). (But here also see Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief, ad loc.*, who contends that while the etymology is attractive there is no real proof to sustain

the reading.) Bessone, especially 28–41, sees in Medea's final words an acknowledgment that elegy is not the genre to represent her essentially tragic nature in the best possible way. The heroine requires something *maius* ("greater"), a more elevated genre in the canon, as the part of her story that traditionally belongs to tragedy is about to begin. Similarly, see Heinze, 39–41.

117. See the chapters on Medea of both Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, and Verducci, *Toyshop*, *passim*. The Apollonius/Euripides split also lies at the heart of the genre-based interpretations of Bessone, *Epistula XII*, and Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief*. The Medea of the *Argonautica* furnishes material for the elegiac incarnation of the heroine, while Euripides' *Medea* provides her with the material for her tragic manifestation in *Heroides* 12.

118. Here again I disagree with Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, who considers Medea's attempts to portray herself as loving, innocent, and naive nothing more than "a weak attempt at softening the guilt of which she herself is cognizant" (113). Cf., however, Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief*, line 120.

119. Hinds, "Medea in Ovid," 28, Bessone, *Epistula XII*, *ad loc.*, and Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief*, 38, similarly note the echo.

120. Verducci, *Toyshop*, however, attributes a different motive to Medea's repetition (70ff). She argues that Medea almost succeeds in drawing herself as a sympathetic character who judges her own actions according to a set of rules distorted by love. In the end, however, the reader cannot go along with this Medea, perceiving at last the "true" character capable of monstrous deeds.

121. Here compare Dido's belief in *Heroides* 7 that while Aeneas might not care if she were to kill herself, certainly he would be upset if she were to kill herself while carrying his child (133–38).

122. Bessone, *Epistula XII*, similarly notes the echoes, lines 188ff. Her emphasis, however, is on ironic foreshadowing. In Bessone's interpretation these lines do not induce the reader to think of Hypsipyle or of how Medea is here choosing to construct herself, but instead call to mind Medea's future murder of her sons who perhaps, Bessone ventures, were slaughtered by the titular heroine of Ovid's lost tragedy, *Medea*, precisely because they looked like Jason. Also see Heinze, *Der XII. Heroidenbrief*, *ad loc.*, who notes Medea's use of Hypsipyle's *noverca*.

123. Bessone, *Epistula XII*, *ad loc.*, also notes the elegiac nature of these lines. She emphasizes, however, the ironic foreshadowing. The "unknown fires" prefigure Creusa's fiery death, unknown because at this point in the story Medea has not yet fashioned her gruesome revenge. "Pine torches," Bessone continues, cause the reader to think of the Roman marriage ceremony, hence here an ominous connection between marriage (Jason and Creusa's) and fire.

124. This is an important component of the arguments in the chapters on Medea by both Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, and Verducci, *Toyshop*.

125. See Bessone, *Epistula XII*, *ad loc.*

126. Bessone, *Epistula XII*, lines 61ff.

127. See chapter 2, 118.

128. For the discussion see Gianpiero Rosati, "Medea Esule: Ovidio, Her. 12, 110," *Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica* 117 (1989): 181–85. Bessone, *Epistula XII*, *ad loc.*, accepts the argument of Rosati. For *munus* meaning "war trophy" rather than "boon" Rosati points to Briseis' reference to herself in *Heroides* 3 as a potential *munus* to one of Priam's daughters-in-law if she were captured by the Trojans in her attempt to escape from Agamemnon's tent (line 20), and a similar use of the word by Hecuba at *Metamorphoses* 13.511.

129. See Bessone, *Epistula XII*, lines 97–98.

130. Editors have questioned the authenticity of these lines because Hypsipyle now gives us a second recitation of Jason's trials. Knox defends 31–36, noting that repetition is "not out of place," but following A. E. Houseman he brackets 37–38; see Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.* It is in lines 37–38 that Hypsipyle breaks in to ask a second time whether Jason lives. Since she is repeating her narrative of Jason's tests, it seems to me not "inept in sense and destructive of coherency" (Houseman as quoted by Knox) for Hypsipyle to repeat her question about Jason's safety. She represents the trials as great heroic events for Jason, and stresses this fact by her agitation that wells up anew every time she contemplates them.

131. For example, consider the scathing response of Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, who accuses the Ovidian heroine of fruitlessly attempting to lessen her own guilt (113).

132. See Bessone, *Epistula XII*, *ad loc.*

133. Lacan, *Seminar XX, Encore*, 72–73. For Lacan on the Woman, see especially chapters 6 and 7 in *Seminar XX, Encore*.

3. Setting Her Straight

1. See chapter 2, 134, and note 133.

2. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 50.

3. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 277. Appearing at around the same time and also strongly supporting the notion of genuine Ovidian authorship for the fifteenth epistle is Albert R. Baca, "Ovid's Epistle From Sappho to Phaon (*Heroides* 15)," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 102 (1971): 29–38. He explains the poem's transmission, separate from the remaining letters of the collection, by arguing that Ovid himself removed the *epistula Sapphus* from the original version of the single *Heroides* because the heroine was a historical rather than a mythological character. *Heroides* 15, then, became a separate piece. See also G. P.

Goold, review of *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae Heroidum*, edited by Heinrich Dörrie, *Gnomon* 46 (1974): 484 for his contention that *Heroides* 15 is authentically Ovidian. For the few dissenting opinions still current around the time of the writing and publication of Jacobson's book, consider D. W. T. C. Vessey, "Notes on Ovid, *Heroides* 9," *Classical Quarterly* 19 (1969): 349–61; E. J. Kenney, "Liebe als juristisches Problem," *Philologus* 111 (1967): 212–32.

4. For a detailed discussion of metrical anomalies, see Richard J. Tarrant, "The Authenticity of the Letter of Sappho to Phaon (*Heroides* 15)," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 85 (1981): 137–38. Further, words and phrases not found elsewhere in Ovid, or in the Augustan poets, as well as turns of phrase that appear in other Ovidian works, some later in date than the *Heroides*, provide the strongest evidence in support of the argument that *Heroides* 15 is an interpolated text. Here see Tarrant, 139–52. Also see Charles E. Murgia, "Imitation and Authenticity in Ovid: *Metamorphoses* 1.477 and *Heroides* 15," *American Journal of Philology* 106.4 (1985): 456–74. McKeown, *Commentary on Book II*, notes to *Amores* 2.18.25–26, agrees with the argument against Ovidian authorship because of "textual, stylistic, linguistic, and metrical" evidence.

5. Hinds, "Medea in Ovid," has pointed out that the use of Axelsson's theory of *Prioritätsfragen* to determine inauthentic passages is far more subjective than those employing it like to admit (44 and note 76). I discuss Hind's argument more fully in chapter 2, 124–25, and note 104. Hinds explicitly takes on Tarrant's claims about *Heroides* 15 in his footnote 77.

6. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 284, ventures a few suggested parallels between *Heroides* 15 and the Sapphic fragments based on "phonological similarities," arguing for Ovidian word play with the Sapphic originals. These suggestions come as part of a larger discussion of Sapphic echoes at the level of thought and language in *Heroides* 15 (280–85).

7. The epistle survives in only one medieval manuscript, attached to the beginning of the *Heroides*. Daniel Heinsius inserted the poem into its traditional slot as the fifteenth letter in his seventeenth-century edition, perhaps encouraged by the twelfth-century *Florilegium* that preserves excerpts of the missive from Sappho to Phaon between *Heroides* 14 and 16. For a detailed discussion of the transmission of *Heroides* 15, see Richard J. Tarrant, "The *Epistula Sapphus*," in *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 272–73. We might note here that even some of the scholars who hold that the letter does not represent a genuine Ovidian creation admit the insufficiency of relying on the argument of its distinct textual transmission to prove the poem's spuriousness. For example, one of the most staunch proponents for non-Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 15,

Tarrant, "The Authenticity," 135–36, suggests, as an equally plausible explanation for a separate manuscript tradition, that the division of the epistle from the remainder of the work occurred because Sappho is a historical rather than a mythological heroine.

8. See, for example, Knox, "Ovid's *Medea*." Also consider Baca, "Sappho to Phaon," 30, who paraphrases Felix Jacoby, remarking: "As Jacoby has dryly noted, we cannot expect Ovid to be a bibliographer and give us precise lists." See too especially Hinds on "Alexandrian poetic catalogues" as opposed to "shopping lists," "Medea in Ovid" (30ff).

9. This is the situation as posited by Murgia, "Imitation and Authenticity." Tarrant, "The Authenticity," on the other hand, argues that the lines in the *Amores* that make mention of the *epistula Sapphus* are themselves interpolations, the creative additions of someone attempting to pass off as Ovidian a poetic letter from Sappho to Phaon dating, in fact, to the Neronian or Flavian era (152).

10. Gianpiero Rosati, "Sabinus, the *Heroides* and the Poet-Nightingale. Some Observations on the Authenticity of the *Epistula Sapphus*," *Classical Quarterly* 46.1 (1996): 207.

11. Rosati, "Sabinus," especially 211.

12. Farrell, "Reading and Writing," 332–33, with notes 47 and 48.

13. I would note here that if indeed some other poet wrote *Heroides* 15, then the imitator has carefully read his Ovid, and in the Ovidian spirit uncovers the textual premise of the *Heroides*, laying bare the illusory nature of the (male) construction of Woman.

14. For recent discussions of Sappho's afterlife on the Athenian comic stage, see Ellen Greene, "Introduction," in *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 5–6, and Glenn W. Most, "Reflecting Sappho," in *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 14ff. Knox, *Select Epistles*, contends that if the author of *Heroides* 15 based his version of Sappho on a work of literature, it was on one of these lost comedies (278).

15. Harvey, "Ventriloquizing Sappho, or the Lesbian Muse," in *Ventriloquized Voices*, 116–39, especially 116–24. The argument of Verducci, *Toyshop*, chapter 4, "Elegiac Convention as Artistic Dilemma," 123–79, is similar to Harvey's, although Verducci places her emphasis on the wit and humor with which Ovid renders his Sappho artistically impotent, in stark comparison to himself.

16. See Vicky Rimell, "Epistolary Fictions: Authorial Identity in *Heroides* 15," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 45 (1999): 109–35.

17. Marilyn B. Skinner, "Woman and Language in Archaic Greece, or, Why is Sappho a Woman?" in *Feminist Theory and the Classics*,

ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 136–37, suggests that Sappho's poetry survived in antiquity because she articulated an alternative desire to the kind shaped by pre-dominant patriarchal modes of thought.

18. Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho 1546–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 22 and 43.

19. For classical scholarship see now especially the collection of critical writings re-evaluating Sappho, *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

20. Ellen Greene, "Apostrophe and Women's Erotics in the Poetry of Sappho," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 124 (1994): 42–43. Consider also John J. Winkler, "Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics," in *The Constraints of Desire. The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 162–87, and Eva [Stehle] Stigers, "Sappho's Private World," in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Helene P. Foley (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1981), 45–61, both of whom discuss Sappho's "private world." In addition, see Eva Stehle, "Sappho's Gaze: Fantasies of a Goddess and Young Man," *differences* 2.1 (1990): 108; and Skinner, "Women and Language," 130–31.

21. Teresa de Lauretis, quoted by Ellen Greene, "Apostrophe," 43. See also [Stehle] Stigers, "Sappho's Private World," who explains: "The private space is a metaphor for emotional openness in a psychological setting apart from the normal, separate from marriage, home, social life, from everything experienced by a woman in the ordinary course of life" (57).

22. The enumeration represents the text of Edgar Lobel and Denys Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955). When I use specific line numbers in my discussions of the fragments, I am referring to this text.

23. Two of these three characteristics of Sappho's poetry are central to what Winkler calls her private consciousness, "Double Consciousness," 165. He leaves out the fact, perhaps too obvious, that the poems are about women.

24. Except where otherwise noted I am quoting my favorite translations of Sappho's fragments, those of Winkler in "Double Consciousness."

25. Winkler, "Double Consciousness," 186, writes "Virtually every word suggests a sensuous ecstasy in the service of Kyprian Aphrodite (apples, roses, quivering followed by repose, meadow for grazing, spring flowers, honey, nectar flowing)." Similarly, Anne Pippin Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus and Sappho* (Cambridge, Mass.:

Harvard University Press, 1983) suggests that “the goddess’s best-known attributes and parts are rendered by bits of landscape” (263), and further (270ff) that the description of the sanctuary contains images that point to sexual fulfillment for the female worshippers (e.g., the profound quiet and the nectar). Burnett also argues that the Sapphic setting recalls other landscapes from ancient literature that are bound up with female sexuality. She draws parallels, for example, with the landscape surrounding Calypso’s cave in *Odyssey* 5.63ff (266).

26. This translation is by Rip Cohen and Peter Bing from *Games of Venus: An Anthology of Greek and Roman Erotic Verse From Sappho to Ovid* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

27. Although Eva [Stehle] Stigers, “Romantic Sensuality, Poetic Sense: A Response to Hallett on Sappho,” *Signs* 4 (1979): 470, suggests that, in accordance with the gender of the Greek nouns, only the feminine noun “moon,” and not the masculine noun “stars,” is connected to women, it appears, in this fragment at least, that Sappho connects both moon and stars with women.

28. Rebecca Hague [Sinios], “Sappho’s Consolation to Atthis fr 96 LP,” *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984): 33, has noted the erotic purpose of the simile.

29. On the ambiguity and multiplicity of Sappho’s representations of women, see especially, Stehle, “Sappho’s Gaze;” Winkler, “Double Consciousness,” 166–76; Margaret Williamson, *Sappho’s Immortal Daughters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); P. A. Rosenmeyer, “Her Master’s Voice: Sappho’s Dialogue With Homer,” *Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici* 39 (1997): 123–50; Eva Stehle, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece: Nondramatic Poetry in its Setting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), chapter 6, “Sappho’s Circle,” 262–318; Ellen Greene “Re-Figuring the Feminine Voice: Catullus Translating Sappho,” *Arethusa* 32.1 (1999): 1–18.

30. For the complete theorizing of the triangulation of desire see René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

31. This is noted in slightly different terms by “Longinus,” who preserves this fragment for us in *De Sublimitate* 10.1–3. He writes that Sappho sings of her body and its experiences as if they belonged to someone else, and thus, as if she were observing an object external to herself (ὡς ἀλλότρια). Also see Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, who writes about a “shift from internal to external” (240), with regard to the symptoms of desire. As these symptoms become expressed as an external phenomenon, the lover’s experience becomes objective rather than subjective, as if observed through the eyes of a spectator. Cf. Williamson, *Sappho’s*

Immortal Daughters, 157–59, who argues that fragment 31 is the one instance in Sappho's poems that reveals a "sharp distinction" between subject and object.

32. Ellen Greene, "Re-Figuring the Feminine Voice," notes that the impersonal constructions Sappho employs when discussing her bodily disintegration demand the use of personal pronouns in oblique cases. This further heightens the sense of the "I" as object (8).

33. See Stehle, "Sappho's Gaze," especially 107–8.

34. Stehle, "Sappho's Gaze," 110. Similarly, see Jane McIntosh Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 21.

35. See Page duBois, "Sappho and Helen," *Arethusa* 11 (1978): 96.

36. See Margaret Williamson, "Sappho and the Other Woman," in *Reading Sappho*, ed. Greene, 248–64, especially 262–64. In *Sappho's Immortal Daughters* Williamson similarly argues for a linguistic tie between Helen and Anactoria (170).

37. Anne Giacomelli [Carson], "The Justice of Aphrodite in Sappho Fr. 1," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 110 (1980): 139. Williamson makes a similar argument about this fragment in *Sappho's Immortal Daughters*, 163–66. Also see Page duBois, *Sappho Is Burning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 6–9, whose reading, although based on different premises, arrives at a complementary conclusion. She argues against an ahistorical reading of this fragment, suggesting instead that an interpretation that takes into account Homeric echoes sees Sappho's erotic impulse as driven by a desire for domination. For an opposing view, however, see Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978, updated 1989), who contrasts Sapphic passion with structures of male homoerotic desire (177). Similarly, *Games of Venus*, ed. Bing and Cohen, 72, footnote 3.

38. Drawing on Archilochus, Theognis, Xenophon, and Ibycus as examples, Giacomelli [Carson], "The Justice of Aphrodite," maps structures of male homosexuality onto Sappho's text. Similarly John D. Marry, "Sappho and the Heroic Ideal" *Arethusa* 12.1 (1979): 71–92, sees a sharp, unequal division between the two women through the correlation he explores between the erotic and the martial, between Sappho and Homer.

39. Williamson, *Sappho's Immortal Daughters*, observes: "Perhaps, after all, the model for women's erotic relationships sometimes resembled that for men, even if no other surviving poem mentions it" (164).

40. This is noted by Greene. For her excellent discussion of fragment 1, see "Apostrophe," 50–55.

41. Greene, "Apostrophe," 51–52, emphasis hers.

42. See chapter 3, 144–45.
43. For this argument see Stehle, *Performance and Gender*, 300–302, and Williamson, *Sappho's Immortal Daughters*, 153–54.
44. Eva [Stehle] Stigers, "Romantic Sensuality," 469.
45. Greene, "Apostrophe," 47, footnote 6: "Line 23 is usually translated 'your desire,' but the verb is active rather than middle, and so may refer to someone else's desire. The ambiguity may well be intentional since, in the context of mutual desire, it does not matter who is satisfying whom," emphasis hers.
46. [Stehle] Stigers, "Romantic Sensuality," 469.
47. Consider Greene, "Apostrophe," who observes in the fragment a notion of extended space, of movement from interior to exterior (from bed to temple to grove to dances). She draws a parallel between the lack of firm spatial boundaries and a lack of personal demarcations (50).
48. This notion is a constant theme in the work of Luce Irigaray. See both *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) and *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
49. I offer two brief examples that highlight an alternative construction of desire in the Sapphic fragments, one more in line with the theories of Irigaray (see chapter 3, note 48). Here touch is bound up with desire. Winkler singles out two fragments, 48 and 36, for their use of the verb *μαίομαι* in conjunction with the expression of desire. He explains the meaning of the verb by adducing examples from Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar where the definition that best suits the verb is "to search out by feeling" with the understanding that one is seeking a special, hidden object ("Double Consciousness," 184). Sappho employs the verb both times in connection with desire. Fragment 36 runs, "I desire and I search out by feeling," and, "you came and you did it; and I sought you out, and you fired my heart that was burning with desire." These fragments suggest that touch both creates and serves to express desire (185). ("You fired" is the result of a textual emendation proposed by Wesseling, accepted by Winkler, see his note 22, 235.)
50. Synder, *The Woman and the Lyre*, similarly notes that the newly emerging economy of feminine desire includes more than the specular (21).
51. [Stehle] Stigers in "Sappho's Private World" suggests that "the dominant experience of women in love-making and in child-birth [is] intimacy followed by withdrawal" and that Sappho re-creates this experience when she writes about the separation of two women (56).
52. See Hague [Sinos], "Consolation to Atthis," 35.
53. I differ here slightly from Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, who believes that memory of love serves to produce an understanding of how

the emotion is “both eternal and open to repetition” (300). Burnett believes that the departing woman realizes that some other girl will take her place within Sappho’s circle and relive the departing woman’s experience.

54. George Devereux writes in an often quoted passage from “The Nature of Sappho’s Seizure in Fr 31 LP as Evidence of Inversion,” *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 20 (1970): 22: “What can a man offer to a girl that Sappho cannot offer? The answer, I think, is obvious and leads to a clinically highly documentable and crucial finding: few women are as obsessed with a (neurotic) feeling of incompleteness—with the clinically commonplace ‘female castration complex’—as the masculine lesbian. Moreover, the latter experiences her ‘defect’ with violent and crushing intensity particularly when her girl-friend is taken away from her not by another lesbian, but by a *man*, who has what she does not have and which she would give her life to have,” emphasis his.

55. Quoted with as much frequency as the passage from Devereux (chapter 3, note 54) are the comments of Denys Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus: An Introduction to the Study of Lesbian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 28: “does she imply that she is jealous of the man as well as amorous of the girl? The greatest obstacle to our understanding of the whole is indeed our ignorance of the relation of this man to the girl and to Sappho. . . . But we must not forget that the *man* was the principal subject of the whole of the first stanza; and we shall not be content with any explanation of the poem which gives no satisfactory account of his presence and his prominence in it. . . . To maintain that Sappho feels no jealousy of the man would be to ignore the certain response of human nature to a situation of the type described, and to deprive the introduction of the man, and his relation to the girl, of all significance. On this point, at least, there is little room for doubt,” emphasis his.

56. See Winkler’s translation, “Double Consciousness,” 178, along with his explanation, 179. Mary R. Lefkowitz, “Critical Stereotypes and the Poetry of Sappho,” *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 14 (1973): 120, sets forth a similar opinion. For a widely divergent, opposing view, see also Jasper Svenbro, “Death by Writing: Sappho, the Poem, and the Reader,” in *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 145–59. Svenbro argues that the triad in fragment 31 includes the poet or the “I,” the poem or the “you” and the reader or the “he.” Sappho feels jealousy because once she has committed her lyric to paper, the reader, and not the poet, in each re-reading, brings the poem to life. Therefore, for Svenbro, “the relative *ottis*, which here virtually equals *os*, refers to the reader who, seated before the poem, is truly hearing it as he reads it.

This is a specific reader to the extent that each reading is a unique event, albeit one that may be repeated" (155, note 36).

57. "From a central position as origin of female eroticism, the man would be demoted to the status of mere imaginary accessory to a desire that refuses triangulation," DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 324.

58. See Lefkowitz, "Critical Stereotypes," 120.

59. As DeJean cogently explains, *Fictions of Sappho*, 51. See also Winkler, "Double Consciousness," 178, and William H. Race, "'That Man' in Sappho fr. 31 L-P," *Classical Antiquity* 2 (1983): 92–101.

60. This is the argument of Rosenmeyer, "Her Master's Voice," who concludes that fragment 16 allows both versions of Helen's story, Sappho's revision and the epic original, to co-exist.

61. Here one must note that marriage is not the only reason that a woman would have to move away from her home. Perhaps her father or her husband has been forced into exile; indeed, Lesbian aristocratic politics of Sappho's time were rather stormy. In all of these cases, however, the end of the affair between two women is dependent upon a man. See Williamson, *Sappho's Immortal Daughters*, 86–87.

62. Knox, *Select Epistles*, line 19, takes an opposite view, arguing that Sappho undermines her own claims about her passion for Phaon by bringing up the significant number of her past lovers. Again this suggestion falls into line with the majority of scholarship on the *Heroides* that emphasizes the ironic detachment of Ovid as he wittily speaks to his reader through the mouthpiece of his heroine.

63. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, 133–36, lists all the women named as beloveds in Sappho's poetry. Anactoria is mentioned in fr 16, Atthis in fr 49 (?) and fr 96. Cydro's name does not appear in the extant fragments, and for this reason Knox, *Select Epistles*, chooses to print the proposed emendation: *vilis, crede mihi, Gyrinno* ("contemptible, believe me, is Gyrinno"). Knox, *ad loc.*, notes that the name Gyrinno does appear in the Sapphic fragments and that Maximus of Tyre names her as one of Sappho's beloveds.

64. Knox, *Select Epistles, ad loc.*, further emphasizes Sappho's dismissive tone when he notes that *vilis* ("contemptible") is "a strong term in the language of love poetry."

65. Knox's reading is supported by one of the manuscripts. He argues, *Select Epistles, ad loc.*, that "the reading of the vulgate *hic* for *non* is a transparent attempt to deny Sappho's homosexuality." According to C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry: From Alcman to Simonides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), however, either reading implies that the Ovidian Sappho admits that her former passion brought her ill-repute (459, footnote 2).

66. Max Treu, "Ovid und Sappho," *La parola del passato* 8 (1953): 361, and Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 285, point out that repetition is an element of Sappho's poetic style. Moreover, the repetition of *Lesbides*, also serves to draw attention to Sappho's former *female* lovers: see Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*

67. See chapter 3, note 14.

68. See chapter 2, 114–33.

69. For Verducci, *Toyshop*, the "warning to her successors" is one of the "various conventional devices of elegy" through which Ovid fashions his parody in this poem. In this instance he turns the reader's attention to the explicitly *Roman* flavoring, artificial at that, of the *Greek* poet's words (137). Again in this interpretation the relationship between poet and reader takes precedence over the heroine.

70. Ovid declares his own poetic immortality in similar terms. Consider the similarities between *Heroides* 15.27–28 and *Amores* 1.15, 7–8: *mihi fama perennis / quaeritur, in toto semper ut orbe canar* ("eternal fame is sought by me in order that I may be sung throughout the whole world"). Also compare the very famous conclusion to the *Metamorphoses*, 15.871–79. Rimell, "Epistolary Fictions," 126 and note 54, also points out the similarities, and adds two more Ovidian passages: *Remedia Amoris* 363 and *Tristia* 2.118.

71. Expressing a contrary view, Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, argues that the Ovidian Sappho discusses her own poetic talent in an attempt not to fashion herself as a worthy object of desire but rather to boast in a self-congratulatory way about her extraordinary poetic genius (289).

72. See chapter 2, 97–98.

73. I offer an alternative reading to the interpretations of Phaon's character in Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, Verducci, *Toyshop*, and DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*. Jacobson limits the role Phaon plays in Sappho's world, announcing that her interest in him is purely sexual (293–94). Verducci essentially agrees with Jacobson when she asserts that Phaon receives no fleshing out as a character by the writer of the epistle; Sappho is only interested in his beauty (123–82, *passim*). DeJean also suggests that Sappho limits Phaon's importance. Picking up on one of Jacobson's footnotes in which he muses about the boy's beauty in connection with "the obvious allusions to Phaon's effeminateness and implications of his homosexuality" (296, note 59), De Jean argues that "Ovid's Sappho emasculates Phaon" (92). There is a similar argument in Pamela Gordon, "The Lover's Voice in *Heroides* 15: Or, Why Is Sappho A Man?" in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 274–91.

74. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, speculates that the Ovidian Sappho draws attention to the connection she attempts to formulate between

Apollo and Phaon, highlighting the similarity in sound and meaning between Phaon and Phoebus. Jacobson notes that five times in the poem the sun god receives the appellation “Phoebus” (footnote 46, 290).

75. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 283.

76. The text here is corrupt but the sense is that the groom in some way resembles Ares.

77. Stehle, “Sappho’s Gaze,” argues that in Sappho’s poetry the poet makes use of Phaon to explore the narrative possibility of a mutual sexual relation, conducted along lines other than those of the dominant cultural paradigm (94–95). In a relationship between a mortal man and a goddess, two traditional, hierarchical dichotomies, male/female and divine/human, come into direct opposition. Stehle suggests that Sappho employs the sexual relation between Phaon and Aphrodite to fantasize the erotic relationship in the open space created when the traditional, hierarchical power imbalances come into conflict and thus break down. In an altogether different fashion, then, the Ovidian Sappho offers Phaon a position of uncontested power.

78. For example: *invenio silvam, quae saepe cubilia nobis / praebuilt et multa texit opaca coma* (“I find the forest that often offered us a place to lie down, and, shady, covered us with much foliage” [143–44]). Here see Knox, *Select Epistles, ad loc.*, who compares the Ovidian Sappho’s words with those of the very pastoral Ovidian heroine of *Heroides* 5: *praebuilt herba torum* (“the grass offered us a couch” [14]). For a detailed consideration of the pastoral nature of Oenone, see Sara H. Lindheim, “Omnia vincit amor: Or, Why Oenone Should Have Known It Would Never Work Out (*Eclogue* 10 and *Heroides* 5),” *Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici* 44 (2000): 83–101. Knox further compares the Ovidian Sappho’s search for comfort in nature with a similar search by Gallus in Virgil’s *Eclogue* 10. Verducci, *Toyshop*, also briefly discusses the *locus amoenus* and pathetic fallacy with reference to the pastoral genre (170–73). She argues that Sappho’s inability to achieve poetic distance from her all-powerful emotions leads to the travesty in which “the *locus amoenus* (“pleasant spot”) has become a *vile solum* (“worthless piece of ground”)” (171).

79. See Knox, *Select Epistles, ad loc.*, who notes that pathetic fallacy is a trademark of Hellenistic verse, and cites primarily the bucolic poets, Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion, as examples. Also consider Virgil, *Eclogue* 10.

80. See Theocritus, *Idyll* 1 and *Idyll* 7 and Virgil, *Eclogue* 5.

81. Virgil, *Eclogue* 5.62–64.

82. Virgil, *Eclogue* 5.79–80.

83. It is interesting to note that the Ovidian Sappho has carefully combed through pastoral poetry, but not merely for ways in which to

present Phaon. She also extracts from the genre one aspect of her own self-representation. If she establishes her lover according to the model of Daphnis, she constructs herself in the mold of Theocritus' cyclops, the spurned lover Polyphemus (*Idyll* 11), and Virgil's unsightly shepherd, Corydon (*Eclogue* 2). Both Corydon and Polyphemus exalt the beauty of their beloveds in particular by emphasizing their light coloring (*Idyll* 11.20; *Eclogue* 2.14–18), and the Ovidian Sappho follows suit. In addition, both Polyphemus and Corydon attempt to offer something in compensation for their own lack of physical beauty. Polyphemus suggests that Galatea should desire him because of his holdings of sheep and cattle, as well as because of his ability to produce cheese and gather fruit (*Idyll* 11.30ff). Corydon, in a manner replicated by the Ovidian Sappho, emphasizes his poetic talent (*Eclogue* 2.23–24).

84. See chapter 2, 111–14. On the use of feminist, deconstructionist theory of the gaze, see chapter 2, note 79.

85. Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, nicely points out the echo.

86. Jean Hubaux, "Ovide et Sappho," *Le Musée Belge* 30 (1926): 197–218, suggests that the Ovidian Sappho's description of her physical characteristics mirrors the Greek poet's depiction of herself, and of what she considers attractive, in her verse.

87. My argument is quite different from the one recently advanced by Gordon, "The Lover's Voice," especially 280–83. Gordon contends that Sappho differs from the other Ovidian heroines of the collection because she does *not* invite the male gaze upon herself. Rather she herself manipulates a "lecherous gaze" vis-à-vis Phaon. Gordon argues that Ovid constructs his Sappho as if she were an *erastes*, the dominant partner in a male homoerotic relationship. In Gordon's opinion, Ovid attributes masculine behavior to Sappho in such a way that she more closely resembles the abandoning heroes than the other fourteen heroines.

88. For example, *Heroides* 10 lines 15–16; 47–50; 137–40; 145–48. See chapter 2, 111–14.

89. Treu, "Ovid und Sappho," 363, suggests that the Ovidian Sappho claims that she will never again set off her hairstyle with gold she alludes to fragment 98 in which Sappho complains about her inability to acquire a hairband for her daughter.

90. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 461, also perceives a reference to fragment 31 in the Ovidian lines 109–12. Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, notes the similarities between fragment 31 and line 112.

91. Perhaps it is interesting to consider here whether Ovid displays a witty manipulation of genre by subtly reminding the reader that the Greeks made use of the elegiac meter for funeral verse.

92. Consider Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 69, and Verducci, *Toyshop*, 159.

93. Fragment 121. The translation is mine. Both Verducci, *Toyshop*, 160, and Rimell, "Epistolary Fictions," 130, note the allusion to this fragment, although both concentrate their (quite different) interpretations on the relationship Ovid constructs between himself and the Greek Sappho in the poem.

94. Ovid seems to have often returned to the image of various women's naked breasts at the moment of mourning. See Franz Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Die Fasten Band II* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1958), on *Fasti* 4.454, *pectora nuda*, where he cites numerous examples in the *Metamorphoses*. He also cites Propertius 2.24.51–52, and this example seems to indicate the erotic nature of the image as well. Propertius promises to gather up Cynthia's bones after her death and in turn asks her to bare her breasts and loosen her hair if he should die first. On the one hand, the disparity between their imagined activities indicates a division of mourning rituals according to gender. On the other hand, he seems to take pleasure in the erotic picture of Cynthia he conjures up.

95. R. Alden Smith, "Fantasy, Myth and Love-Letters: Text and Tale in Ovid's *Heroides*," *Arethusa* 27.2 (1994): 247–73, suggests that the erotic dreams of Sappho sum up an undercurrent in the Ovidian collection. The heroines in their prolonged separation from the heroes have become so sexually frustrated that they are driven to erotic fantasy. His argument does not emphasize Ovid's response to the Greek poet's verse about which Ovid wrote *et quid enim lascivius illa* ("and what is more lascivious than her poetry?" *Ars Amatoria* 3.331), or the effect of Ovid's intertextual strategy on the particular construction of the Ovidian Sappho.

96. It is tantalizing to posit (with Rimell, "Epistolary Fictions," 123) that the Ovidian Sappho alludes to Sappho's fragment 137, which reads "I wish to say something but a sense of shame hinders me" (my translation), but the state of the Sapphic text is very fragmentary at this point.

97. Not surprisingly *sicca*e has posed problems for editors looking for some modicum of propriety. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, however, justifies the reading of *sicca*e thus: "One can hardly refrain from thinking that the numerous liquids in 129–33 are deliberate preparation for the picture in 134" (294).

98. Verducci, *Toyshop*, 137.

99. It is tantalizing to consider the possibility that the Ovidian Sappho is once again twisting the original poetry of Sappho against herself, here manipulating what may have been a frank and explicit language about sexuality in the Greek poems. Although quite fragmentary, consider fragment 99 and its probable reference to a dildo. On this fragment, see Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, 144–46. Also consider Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, who writes of Sappho's *epithalamia* that they "seem to

have been more rowdy and explicit than certain ancient descriptions would lead one to think" (219).

100. Verducci, *Toysshop*, offers a different reading for these lines. She sees Ovid at work behind the scenes: "Yet Ovid's Sappho, naturally and anachronistically, misunderstands elegy, or what Latin elegy had come to be, or what Ovid had made of elegy. She voices the strategy that Ovid toyed with in all his *Heroides*, to make of erotic elegy an arch and atavistic exercise in a genre that had lost its originally plaintive purpose and meaning. Thus Sappho's protestation of decorum is undermined by its very formulation. She is made to seem at odds with herself, at odds with poetry, and caught in time" (150). DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, also sees a trace of Ovid in these lines, but of a serious Ovid for whom the opening *recusatio* stands as a demand that the reader acknowledge his originality (74). In a different vein, see Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, who notes that the Suda's entry for Sappho shows that she wrote a book of elegies and epigrams.

101. This is the heart of duBois' argument in the introduction to *Sappho Is Burning*, 1–30.

102. Here I disagree with Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 287, who argues that in the opening gambit of *Heroides* 15 the Ovidian Sappho displays her self-centeredness. Lipking, *The Abandoned Woman*, comments on "the sheer *vanity* of the Latin" (68), emphasis his. Further, he asserts: "Nor does Ovid's heroine dignify her lover's name by mentioning it along with her own. Phaon is just the sort of illiterate who will need a literal signature to identify a great poet" (69). Alternatively, Verducci, *Toysshop*, sees humor in these lines, a parody of the *recusatio* frequently found in Latin poetry and especially in Ovid (150). For yet another interpretation of these lines see Hubaux, "Ovide et Sappho," 204, who along with Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, comments on Sappho's fear that Phaon will not recognize her *handwriting*.

103. According to Ovid's version of the story of Dryope at *Metamorphoses* 9.324–93 the *acquatica lotos* is a plant that grows near the water, sports red / purple flowers and produces berries. Moreover, if Knox, *Select Epistles*, *ad loc.*, is correct in equating the *acquatica lotos* with the clove tree, then the grove provides olfactory pleasures too, thus making the spot the Ovidian Sappho describes even more reminiscent of the sanctuary to Aphrodite in Sappho's fragment 2. As Pliny explains, *Naturalis Historia*, 12.30, the clove tree was transported to Rome for the sake of its delightful odor (*advehitur odoris gratia*).

104. Both Hubaux, "Ovide et Sappho," 203, and Verducci, *Toysshop*, 166–69, similarly note the echoes of Sappho's fragment 2.

105. As noted by Verducci, *Toysshop*: "The passage is famous, debated, and curious. It offers a problem of considerable moment. Aphrodite

does not appear to Sappho . . . It is Aphrodite who is expected in the Sapphic ode to which (according to Palmer, Purser, and DeVries) this passage alludes" (174). See also Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, as cited in chapter 3, note 106.

106. Verducci, *Toyshop*, dubs this moment a "credulous account of her therapy session with the Naiad" and therefore a "glaring travesty of the Sapphic epiphany" (137). Conversely, Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, points to the similarities between the Ovidian passage in which the Naiad appears, especially the lush description of the surroundings into which she emerges, and Sappho's own poetry (461).

107. DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 58.

108. For a detailed discussion of Le Fèvre Dacier, see DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 53–60.

Conclusion

1. Here again I am using a heterosexual model because the *Heroides* feature heterosexual relationships.

2. Lacan, *Seminar XX, Encore*, especially chapters 6 and 7.

3. Nancy K. Miller as quoted in James Carson, "Narrative Cross-Dressing in the Novels of Richardson," in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 96.

4. Some may be tempted to argue that Ovid himself, by highlighting the performative nature of his heroines, suggests that Woman, *qua* shape shifter, eludes any possible definition. It seems to me, however, that such an argument runs into difficulties on three grounds. Scrupulously limiting each heroine's repertoire to two performances, relentlessly repeating the same two performances from one heroine to the next, and finally mercilessly dismantling Sappho's vision of women's heterogeneity through the mouthpiece of his Sappho who reproduces the performances of the other heroines of the collection, Ovid makes his best case for revealing an underlying homogeneity in Woman.

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Epistolary Narrative and Desire in Ovid's *Heroides*

Sara H. Lindheim

In the *Heroides* the Roman poet Ovid wittily plucks fifteen abandoned heroines from ancient myth and literature and creates the fiction that each woman writes a letter to the hero who left her behind. But in giving voice to these heroines, is Ovid writing like a woman, or writing "Woman" like a man?

Using feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to examine the "female voice" in the *Heroides*, Sara H. Lindheim closely reads these fictive letters in which the women seemingly tell their own stories. She points out that in Ovid's verse epistles, all the women represent themselves in a strikingly similar and disjointed fashion. Lindheim turns to Lacanian theory of desire to explain these curious and hauntingly repetitive representations of the heroines in the "female voice." Lindheim's approach illuminates what these poems reveal about both masculine and feminine constructions of the feminine.

"*Mail and Female* opens up whole new vistas of interpretation within *Heroides* scholarship—perspectives that will shed light not only on the poems themselves, but demonstrate the usefulness of Lacanian theory to classics. Lindheim's scholarly command both of Lacanian psychoanalysis and of classical philology is superior."—Micaela W. Janan, Duke University

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